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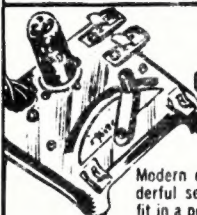


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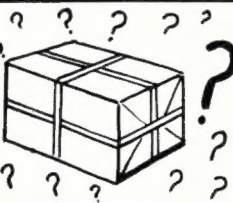
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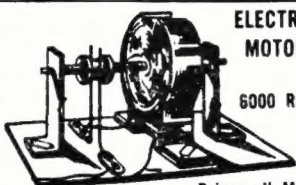
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CRACK DETECTIVE AND MYSTERY

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DETECTIVE STORIES

Volume 16, Number 4

December, 1956

● Featured Fiction

- **KILL THE WENCH DEAD! (Novel)** H. C. Butler 6
I wanted to play with Paula, and she was game — but someone else wanted to play the game of murder.
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An examination into the case for and against capital punishment.

ROBERT W. LOWNDES, *Editor*
MARIE ANTOINETTE PARK, *Asso. Ed.*

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CLIFF CAMPBELL *Asso. Ed.*

CRACK DETECTIVE AND MYSTERY STORIES (formerly Famous Detective Stories) December, 1956, published bi-monthly by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS INC., 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices, 241 Church St., New York 13, N. Y. Entire contents copyright 1956 by Columbia Publications Inc. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass. Single copy 25¢; yearly subscription, \$1.50. Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed envelope to insure return if not accepted and while reasonable care will be exercised in handling, they are submitted at author's risk. Printed in U. S. A.



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KILL THE WENCH DEAD!

They called her Estralita, this peeler who made the Havana dolls look pale, but I knew she was no Latin. I knew Paula Bieszke from the time she wowed Chicago strip-joints and I had to pull her in on dope-smuggling. But whatever she called herself, this gal was my dish—only someone else wanted to play corpses rather than curves!

FEATURED MYSTERY NOVEL

by H. C. BUTLER

YOU HAVE probably never been to the *Bamboo Club* in Havana. Tourists don't go there. It's a smoke-clouded Cuban nitery on a side street near the Prado, a cosmopolitan boulevard that slices Old Havana into two swarming halves. We were there because Johnny Swan wanted to show me what a low-grade Cuban sin-palace looked like.

"Even worse than you have in Chicago," he'd promised me.

We sat there sipping banana daquiris and watching the floor show, and the girls did the same sort of dances they do in Chicago's strip-joints, except to a rumba beat.

"Nudity," I told Swan, "is an international commodity."

Johnny Swan just grinned. He was in his mid-thirties, but looked younger. He had sandy, unruly hair, which he kept brushing back out of his eyes with his hand, and a contagious smile I remembered from ten years ago when he'd worked for me. He'd started out as a leg-man in my Chicago agency. Now he had a place of his own in Havana which catered mostly to the American trade—which meant the money trade.

"The wonderful thing about being a private dick," he said, "is that you meet such interesting people. Wait until you see Estralita. She's quite a novelty in Cuban night-life, probably because she dances with her clothes on."

"That's different," I admitted.

He rolled his eyes suggestively as he sipped the daquiri. "But brother, can she shake! Wait'll you see her!"

I waited. She was the last number on the program, and when she appeared my eyeballs pulled at their sockets. Estralita was the feature attraction of the evening, and the reasons were all obvious. She was a lovely, lush brunette with an assortment of curves that could make a man climb walls. She had the flashing black eyes and Latin vivaciousness characteristic of all Spanish girls—but the strange thing about her was the fact that she wasn't Spanish at all. As soon as I saw her I recognized her—even with clothes on.

"Estralita, eh? Where did she pick up that monicker?"

Swan pulled his eyes from her. "Eh?"

"Your Estralita happens to be a Polish babe who has been shaking it in Chicago bistros for years," I told him. "I meet interesting people too."

Swan simply shrugged. "Okay, so she's Polish and from Chicago instead of Spanish from Barcelona. What difference? Show girls are never what they seem anyway."

"Especially this one," I said. "I knew her when she was a babe at the *600 Club* and whose only virtue was that she had none. I've handled a couple of cases for her, even had a chance to finger her to the Feds once because she was sweet on a lug named Louie Goon who was making a pile of moola smuggling dope. Louie got fifteen years, but

they were never able to pin anything on—er—Estralita.”

“You couldn’t pin anything on her now either,” said Swan gayly. “Look at her wiggle!”

I LOOKED. Swan was enjoying her immensely. So were the Cuban caballeros in the audience. Estralita was dressed in a colorful Spanish dress with a tantalizingly low neckline and a wide hem that swished at her ankles. In between these two extremes the dress was skin-tight and shimmered sensually over her moving body—which was enough to make any Cuban male sing songs under her balcony. But, unlike so many shake-dances, there was a specific reason for the shakes this time. Estralita had two golden maracas tied to her hips—those gourd-like instruments filled with pebbles that make the characteristic swish-swish sound of Cuban bands. Most people shake them by hand, but Estralita shook them by hip. At each suggestive movement of her hips the maracas rattled—all in time to the music. It was highly effective.

She danced for fully five minutes, every now and then moving close to the boys at ringside and favoring them with close-up gyrations that not only rattled the maracas but also their teeth. I noticed she showed a particular yen for a large fat man in a tan tropical suit—a yen he seemed to return with considerable enthusiasm.

“Who’s the fat boy?” I asked.

Johnny Swan pushed his hand through his tangled hair. “He’s the owner of the *Bamboo Club*. Sebastian Lujan, by name. Reputed to be one of the richest men in Cuba; even has an edge on the sugar barons. Estralita’s supposed to be his pet canary.”

I kept looking at him. Somehow he fascinated me more than Estralita did. He was extremely heavy—about 300 pounds, I would have guessed—and he looked as if he wouldn’t have to worry

where his next peso was coming from. He had the olive skin peculiar to the tropics, and large brown eyes like those of a frightened doe. When he smiled, as he did every time Estralita swayed close to him, he showed a flash of gold in his teeth.

“What makes him so rich?” I asked Swan. “The guy doesn’t pull any fortune out of *this* dump.”

Swan finished his banana daquiri, looked at the empty glass sadly. “Even a private eye can’t know everything. All I know is that he has it.”

I finished my drink and stood up.

“Where you going?” Swan asked, startled.

I grinned. “I’m going to Estralita’s dressing room,” I said. “When her act ends I’m going to be there to greet her.”

“Why?” Swan’s eyes, which matched his sandy hair, were half-wide with surprise.

“For fun,” I said. “I’m on vacation, remember? I don’t know a woman in all Havana. Estralita could fill the void in my life. As I remember her, she was good at filling voids. . . . What to come along?”

Swan stood up. “Uh-uh,” he said. “She’ll be plenty busy filling one void at a time. I’ll see you tomorrow.” He leaned over, speaking close to my ear. “Just don’t get mixed up with Sebastian Lujan,” he warned. “He’s not only rich, he’s politically powerful.”

“I’m not running for president,” I said.

I THREADED my way between tables toward a small door near the edge of the stage marked private. I sashayed right past the eminent Lujan, but he was so busy drooling over Estralita that he didn’t give me a second glance—or even a first one. The door led into a long, badly-lighted hallway with dressing rooms on either side. I found one with a cardboard placard which said “*Estralita*” in block letters, pushed the door in, and went inside.

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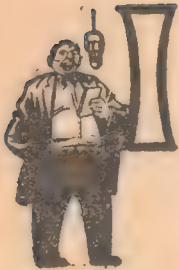
side. There was a dim light in the room, spreading softly from a bridge lamp in one corner. The place was tastefully furnished in modernistic blonde-wood furniture. There was a wide bed covered with a beautiful satin bedspread—and Estralita, clad only in a thin black nightgown that revealed intimate shadows of her body, lay across the bed, her head turned so that her right cheek rested softly against the pillow.

She was a breathtaking sight, one that quickened the pulse and sent the blood racing. But there was one thing wrong—one solitary thing that marred the beauty of the picture.

The side of her head had been bashed in and blood trickled down her ivory neck to the pillow.

She was very dead.

- 2 -



I STOOD there staring, not quite believing it. Then I suddenly realized that the door was open behind me, so I reached back with the heel of my shoe and kicked it shut.

I took in the over-all scene in quick, nervous glances. I had seen corpses before, and I'd been trained to look for vital things. I saw two right away.

Next to Estralita's body on the bed was one of the two gold maracas she'd used in her shake-dance. It had apparently rolled into the depression in the mattress caused by Estralita's body, and it nestled next to her as if delighted at the intimacy of the location. The other maraca was not in evidence. That was one thing, but there was another. The second thing I saw was a small alligator pouch with draw strings at the top, about the size of a tobacco pouch. It lay on the floor directly beneath the

point where Estralita's feet dangled at the side of the bed.

I could find no murder weapon at first glance, although it was obvious that Estralita had been killed with the well-known blunt instrument. And, from the shape and condition of the wound, I judged that one blow had done the damage.

I crossed to the telephone and uncradled it. A girl's voice said something in Spanish. I said, "Give me the police...the gendarmes...the bobbies, or whatever the hell you call them here."

There was a rattle of Spanish, a short wait, then an English-speaking voice came on.

"Give me the Havana police," I repeated. "Homicide."

I got the connection at once, but it took some more finagling to get an English speaking cop. The officer said he would have a detective right out.

"Send one I can talk to," I suggested.

Then I stood in the middle of the room and waited, while all the pleasant hopes of the evening crashed around me. It was actually only a few minutes before the police came, but it seemed an eon. Despite my work, I'd never become accustomed to dead bodies, especially when the body was that of a beautiful girl. Murdering a pretty girl belonged in the same senseless category as crushing a rose.

I kept gazing around the room, but there was nothing else of interest. Reconstructing, Estralita had apparently come to her apartment, changed into a black nightie (for me?), and then was struck by her assailant. I looked into a closet near her bed and saw that it was deep enough so that the killer might have hidden in it, awaiting his chance. I crossed over and touched her arm. It was still warm, which meant the killing had just occurred—within the half hour between her arrival home at two and my call at two-thirty.

And I kept thinking, Sebastian Lujan had been up here tonight. I'd seen his

frightened, putty-colored face, the fear in his large brown eyes.

But the closet, though deep, was narrow—and I found myself doubting that the 300-pound Lujan could have hidden in it.

There seemed nowhere else to hide...

THE HOMICIDE man who answered my call was a thin dapper little fellow dressed in a well-creased tropical suit and a Panama hat with a floppy, turned-down brim. He was dark-complexioned, as most Cubans are, and he had dark blackish eyes that kept flashing about the apartment, never still. His movements were quick, jerky, bird-like.

"I am Inspector Estaban Miranda," he informed me with some importance. "Your name, senor?"

"Mike Tenner, private detective from Chicago."

His dark thin eyebrows crept upward. "So? Tell me what happened." He waved his thin hand at Estralita.

I told him that I'd known Estralita before, that she was actually a denizen of the Chicago jungle. I told him how I'd seen her number at the *Bamboo Club*, and how she'd invited me to see her in her room, since she was leaving Havana in the morning. He listened with rapt attention, stroking his pointed chin nervously. When I finished he walked over and looked at Estralita's lush body with coldly professional interest.

"It is most unfortunate," he said finally. "Estralita was a most popular dancer."

"Apparently there was someone she wasn't popular with," I said.

He looked at me with his head tipped to one side, as a robin regards a fresh worm. "So it seems, senor." He nodded his head in jerky agitation. He touched Estralita's arm and grunted. "Recent."

I told him the timing on it—some time between two and two-thirty. He nodded again, stooped down and picked

up the alligator-skin pouch. He looked into it, shrugged delicately, and passed it to me. It was empty.

"What do you make of it, Miranda?" I asked, just to see what he'd say.

He hunched his thin shoulders again, spread bony hands. "I am—what you Americanos call it—all screwed up."

I grinned and watched him as he picked up the maraca and looked at it with a peculiar lack of interest. He was about to discard it when I said, "Where's the other one?"

His head jerked around. "Eh, senor?"

"The other maraca; have you ever seen Estralita's act?"

A sparkle crept into his black eyes. "Yes, senor."

"Then you'll recall she danced with two maracas, one tied to each hip. Both gold-colored."

His eyes widened and the eyebrows drew upward again. "You are right, senor."

"Then I repeat—where's the other one?"

He started to scan the bed, the floor around the bed, his eyes darting around, quickly, all-perceivingly.

"Perhaps she left it at the club?"

"It hardly seems likely," I said. "She'd hardly bring one home and not the other. Besides, she was going to leave in the morning for the Miami club she works in; she would naturally have taken both maracas with her."

MIRANDA caught the wisdom of that. He crossed to the door and said something to the two Cuban cops who had followed him in. They came inside and started to search the place. While they went over the room Miranda turned to me. "You, senor. You said you had a date to meet Estralita here?"

"Yes."

"You were on friendly terms?"

"Of course."

"You didn't perhaps quarrel after you arrived here?"

I shrugged. There was no use getting sore; the guy was doing his duty. I said, "Look, Miranda. I didn't kill her. I knew her when she was a peeler in Chicago. I always kind of liked her. I handled a couple cases for her, and she always paid well—if you know what I mean."

"So?"

"So tonight I'm in Havana and I'm lonesome for female companionship. I go to the *Bamboo Club* and who should I see but Estralita. So we make a date to discuss old times. I come up here and find her dead. Period."

Miranda tugged at his chin thoughtfully, finally sighed. "I think I believe you, senior. Since you are a detective, perhaps you can help us; maybe there is something in her background, senior, that will help."

I leveled with him. I told him everything I knew about Estralita, formerly Paula Bieszke. About her association with Louie Goon, the heroin smuggler. Everything.

"She was quite a gal," I finished. "Had a great big uncontrollable yen for men all the time. I understand her latest heart-throb was Sebastian Lujan, the owner of the *Bamboo*."

I wasn't quite prepared for the reaction this news produced. Miranda's eyebrows crawled up his forehead, and I thought I detected a troubled cloudiness in his eyes.

"Lujan!" He said the name almost with reverence. "Why, Lujan is one of our most influential and wealthy citizens!"

"What does that make me?" I asked.

"I do not know what that makes you, senior," Miranda replied firmly. "But it makes me very cautious. I might suggest that it would be impossible to suspect that Lujan killed this—this cheap dancer!"

He sounded violently outraged, as though even mentioning Lujan's name in connection with murder was uttering some kind of sacrilege.

Well, I had news for him. I had held it back until now, but this was the right time to break it.

"Lujan might be above suspicion to you, but not to me," I said. "As a matter of fact, I'm reasonably sure that Lujan was in this room tonight."

"What!"

I TOLD HIM about meeting the obese Senor Lujan at the elevator. I told him about the fear-stricken expression on his global face. Miranda took it quietly, a little pain creeping into his thin, pointed face. When I was finished he shrugged his lean shoulders daintily.

"It is most interesting, senior, but, embarrassing," he muttered.

"Why?"

"Because you cannot accuse a man of Lujan's stature of murder. Not unless you're very sure of yourself. After all, he is not only rich, senior—he is politically powerful."

It was the second reference to Lujan's politics I'd heard; the first had come from Johnny Swan. It was getting tiresome.

"In my country we don't coddle killers because they're rich or happen to know a senator," I said. "Lujan sounds to me like just the kind of guy I'd like to play poker with."

"Poker, senior?"

"Or any other game, including cops and robbers." I could tell by Miranda's puzzled face that he had no idea what I was talking about. "If it embarrasses you too much to question this Lujan character, how about letting me do it?"

Miranda looked at me sharply. "Your interest in this case is personal?"

I glanced at Estralita's body on the bed. She looked gorgeous even in death, even with the ugly wound above her temple and the blood matted in her raven hair.

"I knew this girl; we were friends. I'd like to know who killed her—and why."

Miranda shrugged again—that curious, half effeminate shrug, the slight

movement of his thin shoulders, upward, then down. "I shall appreciate your help, senor," he said, and I couldn't tell whether he meant it or not.

The Cuban cops had just about completed their search of the room. Another man had come on the scene, too—the Cuban equivalent of a medical examiner. He was quietly examining the body, fussing over it like a nervous midwife. One of the searching cops said something to Miranda in Spanish.

"Nothing," Miranda said to me. "The other maraca is not in the apartment."

"It seems strange," I said. "A logical assumption is that both maracas must have been here when Estralita was killed. Yet now we find only one. Question—where is the other maraca?"

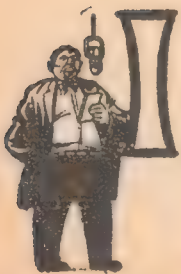
Miranda offered no answer, but I could tell he was thinking hard. There seemed only one answer to the question—Estralita's killer had taken the other maraca with him. I suggested this to Miranda and he just stared blankly at me.

"Why," he asked, "would a man steal a maraca? You can buy them at any store or from any street vendor. Why would a man commit murder for a maraca?"

"That," I said, "is the jackpot question."

Miranda didn't know what I meant.

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DIDN'T stay around much after that. The m.e. verified the time of death for us, some fingerprint men dusted the place and found nothing valuable, and a second search of the apartment failed to uncov-

er either the maraca or the murder weapon used on Estralita's pretty head.

I told Miranda that, due to my personal interest in the case, I'd like to talk to Estralita's partner and Sebastian Lujan on the morrow. He said he was glad to have my help and saw no objection, if I went easy. In fact, I think he preferred that I question Lujan unofficially, so he wouldn't have to.

I went back to my hotel and dropped in bed with my mind humming with questions.

Had Lujan killed Estralita? It was altogether possible, since I'd seen him leaving the scene of the crime; but there were other puzzlers too. Why had the killer taken the second maraca? Where was the murder weapon? Apparently the killer had taken both with him from the scene of the crime. Yet I hadn't noticed that Lujan was carrying a heavy object or a maraca at the elevator. Of course, he wouldn't have carried them unconcealed, anyway—but a maraca would be difficult to conceal. Even if it was stuck under his coat, it would make a noticeable round bump.

Well, I hadn't studied Lujan that carefully—maybe he *had* been carrying the maraca under his coat. Maybe he'd been carrying the murder weapon, too—whatever it was. Maybe he'd been carrying a grand piano.

I went to sleep thinking about it. I woke up still thinking about it. The thinking accomplished very little. I still lacked all the answers.

I shaved quickly, slipped into some clothes, and called Johnny Swan. His voice came on sleepily. "Wake up, you lecher," I said. "We've got a job to do."

He asked me with strained politeness what job was so important it had to be done in the morning.

"I'm investigating a murder," I said. "I thought you'd like to be in on it."

"A *murder*!" For the first time he sounded awake.

"Yes. Estralita's been killed."

There was a stunned silence on the other end. Swan uttered a couple unin-

telligible cuss words and then I briefed him on the whole deal. When I was finished he said, "My God, Mike—you didn't have to kill the wench!"

I told him to shut up and pick me up in fifteen minutes. I was on the sidewalk in front of the hotel, beating off the inevitable street vendors, when he pulled up in his slightly-battered 1948 Ford. His haystack hair was uncombed, he was unshaven, and he had an early morning wildness in his eyes.

"Where to?" he asked.

"The airport," I said. "Estralita was to meet her partner there at seven. I doubt if he knows about her death yet; the morning papers haven't hit the streets."

Without a word Swan whipped the car around with a screech of tires and headed for the airport. There were no big flights scheduled when we got there, but there was a small plane standing in readiness near the hangar with the name, *Bamboo Flier*, on the side.

"That's Lujan's private plane," Swan said. "Estralita and Orlando use it to go back and forth to Miami."

Orlando was already there, standing near the plane talking to the pilot. He had two suitcases at his feet. He was attired in sport shirt and slacks, and judging from his youth and his build, he could have been an athlete. He had black pomaded hair combed rigidly back, the characteristic dark eyes, and a tiny clipped gigolo-type mustache.

"Can this guy talk English?" I asked.

"With Latin sincerity," said Swan.

WE WALKED up to him and he looked at us oddly, as if we were trespassing on his private property.

"I'm Mike Tenner, detective," I said. "I'd like to talk to you."

He smiled. He had even white teeth, and I got the immediate—and purely masculine—impression that he was too damned handsome for his own good.

"Si, senior."

"We have bad news for you," I said; "Estralita is dead."

I don't think he got it at first. He kept staring at me as the toothy smile faded slowly from his bronze face. At last he said, "Dead?" in an unbelieving voice.

I nodded. "I'm helping Inspector Miranda of Homicide investigate the case. She was murdered."

That was the final blow. Either he was completely stunned or else he was a great actor—and I had never heard him ranked with the Barrymores.

I took him by the arm and led him into the hangar and we sat down on a bench there. He recovered slowly from the shock.

"Maybe you can help us," I suggested.

He turned toward me suddenly, eagerness in his face. "Si, senior! I will try!" His voice was half-husky, emotional, but there was sincerity in it.

"Did Estralita have any enemies?" I asked.

He shook his head. "She was very popular."

"Always the case," Swan lamented dryly. "Nobody ever gets bumped except popular people who have no enemies."

"Have any idea who might have done this, Orlando?" I asked.

"No. No idea, senior."

"I understand she was sweet on Sebastian Lujan?"

Orlando's fine lips went tight, like stretched rubber bands. He sighed with typical Latin emotion. "I am afraid so."

"What do you mean, afraid so?"

He spread his hands helplessly. "Estralita is—was—very lovely. I had hopes for myself."

"I see. Was Lujan in love with her?"

"Who can tell?" Orlando forced a sad smile. "Lujan is wealthy; he can have any woman he wants. Almost any woman."

I tried another route. "About Estra-

lita—was there anything noticeable or suspicious in her actions lately? Did she seem worried about anything?"

He didn't answer at once. He seemed to be weighing his thoughts, balancing them. "She did seem a bit—how do you say it—irritable. At times, that is."

"What times?"

"What times, senor?" He started to spread his hands again, then caught himself. "Now that you mention it, it seems she was most irritable when we traveled. Never at the show or at rehearsal; only when we were traveling to Miami."

"Not when you were coming back to Cuba?"

ORLANDO looked at me with sudden admiration. "It never occurred to me before, senor, but it *does* seem to me she was most short-tempered and unstrung when *going* to Miami, not coming back. It could be that she loved to come back to Cuba and hated Miami; I think she said that once."

"Can you tell us anything else, Orlando?"

The Spaniard hesitated. He looked up at me appealingly. "Senor, I will tell you this, because it will come out anyway, although it means nothing."

"Yes?"

"Estralita and I had an argument just before our act last night."

"About what?"

Orlando shrugged. "A professional argument. I felt she was taking the spotlight, pushing me in the background. We had words about it. But you must not put a wrong interpretation on it, senor. Dance partners often argue; then they forget it. It was just something we had to discuss. I became angry and called her a despicable little wench—but I did not kill her dead, senor."

I didn't press him any further. He seemed badly shaken by the news. When we left I offered him a ride to wherever he wanted to go. He shook his head. "I will get a taxi."

He handed me a calling card, "If I can be of any help, senor, call on me. I will not be going to Miami now."

We went back to Swan's jalopy and, once inside the car, Swan said, "Not much help, eh?"

"I don't know, Johnny," I said. "This irritableness of hers might be a key to something. Tell me, why in hell would she be upset, nervous, short-tempered, every time she flew to Miami—and not when she came back?"

"Maybe, like Orlando said, she hated Miami."

"Not a sufficient reason," I said. "There must be something else. Suppose you take me to the abode of one Lujan, Sebastian; he may have some answers."

It was only a fifteen minute drive into the wealthy Vedado section of Havana. This is a section of beautiful homes, well-kept lawns, tropical flowers and shrubs—the showplace of Havana's monied people. Lujan's place turned out to be the most showy of all. It set back from the main road a considerable distance, and was approached by a semicircular cinder drive through a riot of colorful flowers and gracefully swooping palm trees. The house itself reeked wealth from every Spanish balcony. It was a large stucco place, white with yellow trim, and was fronted by a fountain of marble statuary that must have cost a pretty peso.

In front of the house, on the cinder drive, stood a large black sedan—with gold hubcaps!

I expected a stone-faced servant to answer the door, and I wasn't disappointed. Except for a tropical tan, the manservant looked like a character out of Charles Dickens.

I told him we were private detectives and wanted to talk to Lujan, and when he began to give us the Cuban variety of the brushoff I told him we were working for Homicide and if Lujan didn't care to answer a few questions there were other ways to get at

him. That got us action. We were ushered into a fabulous living room which was large enough to hold an Elk's ball, gorgeously furnished with lounges, tables, chairs and other assorted appointments that would have done justice to an Indian rajah's palace.

WE SAT DOWN and Lujan came in a moment later, softly treading over the ankle-deep rugs. I almost expected a bevy of dancing girls to follow him, but none came. He turned out to be the bow-and-scape kind, shaking hands with us in an altogether too elaborate manner and smiling his gold-toothed smile.

"A pleasure—a distinct pleasure," he said, and his voice had an oily quality to it.

He sat down in a chair, his heavy body sinking deep in the cushions. As if on signal, the stone-faced servant came in with a tray full of drinks.

"Cuba Libres," said Lujan graciously. "Made with the finest Jamaica rum. Practically a national drink with us, you know."

I took the rum and coke and tasted it. It was cool and sweet and very nice indeed.

"Now—what can I do for you gentlemen?"

I didn't like him. He was too smooth, too sure of himself; he would not be an easy one to handle. He would be adroit at edging way from questions he didn't like, cautious of his answers, loquacious, but short on information.

"We have bad news for you, Lujan," I said.

His round brown eyes widened. His mouth became a smaller O in the oval of his face.

"Estralita is dead."

He was in the act of drinking when I said it. He stopped, set the glass down on a nearby table. "You are joking, senor."

"I'm not joking. She's dead. Murdered. Hadn't you heard?"

He looked at me curiously. I felt

like an insect under a microscope. He was studying me, weighing me, testing. "Of course not. When did this happen?"

I filled him in with most of the details, enough to give him the pitch.

"This is shocking." He picked up his glass and drained half of it, as if he really needed it. His pudgy hand, however, was still as he set the glass down again.

"Not nearly as shocking to you as it must have been to Estralita," I commented. "Know who might have killed her?"

"Of course not." He seemed surprised that I should ask him. "She was well-liked. Even her partner liked her—and very often it's the other way around between dance partners. Although," he rolled the word around in his mouth, "they *did* have a little quarrel last night."

"Serious?"

"Perhaps not—who can say?"

He was a smooth, silky-voiced one. He was accusing no one, but he was deftly planting the seeds of suspicion. I sipped at the drink. The ice cubes in the glass tinkled.

"Let's get back to you," I said; "were you in love with her?"

He rewarded me with the gold-toothed smile. "Let's say I was attracted to her," he amended. "There's a difference."

"A lot of people were attracted to her," I said.

"That is perhaps the truth, senor."

"Were you attracted to her last night?" I prodded.

Lujan's eyes grew rounder. Set in his global face, they made him look downright innocent.

"Meaning what, senor?"

Yes, he was a master in avoiding an answer, is parrying a question, in saying nothing when he wanted to say nothing. So I laid it right on the line.

"What were you doing in Estralita's room last night?" I asked bluntly.

HE DIDN'T answer at once. There was no change in his bland expression. But some of the blood rushed out of his head, leaving his face a muddy, scared color—the way it had been when I'd seen him at the elevator. "You seem to know quite a bit about my business," he said cautiously.

"A little," I admitted. "Estralita was killed sometime between two o'clock and two-thirty. It was at that time that I met you at the elevator on the fourth floor, where Estralita had her apartment."

Lujan set his drink down with an excited clatter. Some of the blandness was gone, and there was a set seriousness to his face. "I knew I had seen you somewhere!" His voice was hoarse, but under control. "Since you saw me at Estralita's apartment, then I might as well tell you my part in this."

"A noble decision," I said.

He leaned back in the chair, the cushions flattening under his immense weight. "As I have said, I was attracted to Estralita. What man wouldn't be? The girl had beauty, charm, vivaciousness."

"And sex," I said.

"Yes, senor—and sex. But to go on—I visited her quite often in her apartment. Last night I decided to see her. She didn't know I was coming, so I gave her time to get home, and arrived there about two-twenty. I walked into her room and found her—dead."

I just looked at him. The funny part of it was, I believed him. Not that I trusted him; his looks, his careful mannerisms, his slick smoothness—all these characteristics convinced me that Sebastian Lujan had a capacity for evil. But there was a trace of shock in his voice when he said he'd found her dead.

"How did you get into her apartment?" I asked.

He smiled. "I have a key, senor."

It sounded like Estralita. If I knew the former Paula Bieszke at all, there

were probably many men who had a key to her apartment. Estralita would have had no trouble getting men. Her problem would have been to schedule them so that no two showed up at the same time.

"What did you do after finding her dead?"

"What could I do? I left. I have a reputation I must protect; I could not be found with a dead dancer in her apartment."

I drained my glass and stood up. Swan, who hadn't said a word since we arrived, took the cue and finished his in a giant gulp.

"Thanks, Lujan," I said. "You'll probably hear from us again."

He looked disturbed. "I hope there will be no publicity."

I grinned. "When a lush sex-package like Estralita is found dead, you can hardly keep it out of the papers."

"But my part in it—"

I shrugged. "It will be up to the Havana police what information is released to the papers."

We left him standing in the doorway, looking suddenly like a very small man caught in an entangling mesh rather than the all-powerful big shot he was.

I didn't like him.

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WAN AND I spent the rest of the day getting delightfully plastered on Cuban beer. We stopped in the bar along the Prado to have a couple before going to Inspector Miranda's office to report our findings. But we ended

up spending the day there, mulling over our troubles.

There was a diarrhea of talk, but a

constipation of ideas. It was possible Lujan and Estralita had a lovers' quarrel and Lujan killed her; it was possible he didn't. For that matter, Lujan hadn't been Estralita's only visitor last night. I'd been one. And as far as Miranda was concerned, I was perhaps as good a suspect as Lujan.

So I got drunk.

I woke up the next morning with a bouncing stomach but a level head. After I washed and shaved I felt better. A little light cereal was enough to hold my stomach down, and then I headed for Inspector Miranda's office. I found the Cuban officer sitting with his feet on the desk, pulling at his V-shaped chin in thought. His face brightened a little when I walked in. "Ah, señor! I have been waiting for your report."

"On what?"

"You visited Sebastian Lujan?"

I nodded. I told him everything about my chat with Lujan and with Orlando. He listened with big-eared attention. When I was through he said, "I think we had best believe Lujan; he is an important man."

It made me sore all over again. "Important or not, he's number one suspect on my list. After all, he was at the scene of the crime. He could have had a motive, he certainly had an opportunity. And I gathered a very definite impression that your remarkable Lujan is no angel—that somewhere in his oily makeup there is evil."

"You are being—what you call it—dramatic," said Miranda.

"Or realistic." I asked him what he had found. The answer was that he had found nothing, and I gathered that he hadn't really done much looking. The Cuban police were working slowly and carefully on this, because a wheel like Lujan was involved and they wanted to make no hasty decisions that would be rued later.

"And you say this Orlando quarreled with Estralita last night?" Miranda

seemed intrigued with the idea. It must have looked like an out to him. Someone to arrest besides the redoubtable Lujan.

The door opened at this point and Johnny Swan came in, carrying a thick, bulging briefcase. He grinned at me, made a crack about the redness of my eyes, and dropped into a chair.

"What gives in the Case of the Dancing Dame?" he asked.

I told him nothing much gave. Miranda seconded the motion. Swan set the briefcase down on the floor.

"Paper work on my last case," he explained. "Carry it around with me, looking for a chance to work on it—which I never get. . . . Incidentally, I've just been to Estralita's apartment."

Miranda's thin eyebrows went up. Swan grinned.

"I got to thinking about that missing maraca," he said. "I couldn't figure why the murderer would take it; I wanted to see if it wasn't in the apartment after all."

"Our men searched the place thoroughly," Miranda said, irritated at this slur to his efficiency. "My guard didn't let you in, did he?"

SWAN BRUSHED back his unruly hair. "A private dick can get into anything," he said. "Although he did give me a bad time. I finally talked him into letting me go in the room, but he stayed right on my tail every second."

"Good man," Miranda said happily. "You didn't find the maraca?"

"No."

I said, "When are you taking the guard off the door?"

Miranda shrugged gracefully. "In a day or two; we can't keep him there forever."

"About the maraca," I went on. "I've been thinking about it too. I've come up with an idea."

This surprised everyone, even me, but I had thought of it during the night when I was half awake and half sleep-

ing and my mind was spinning with questions.

"Go on, senor."

"Well, we've been going on the assumption that there are two things missing from the scene of the crime—the golden maraca and the murder weapon. Right?"

"Check," said Swan.

"All right. So let's switch it. It occurs to me that maybe there's only one thing missing—the murder weapon only."

"I do not follow," said Miranda simply.

"In other words," I said, "the maraca and the murder weapon might be one and the same article."

Miranda looked at me. Swan looked at me. I looked at both of them.

"Are you trying to say, senor, that Estralita was killed with the missing maraca?" Miranda's voice was fringed with doubt.

"It's possible."

He shook his head slowly. "It doesn't seem likely, senor. After all, a maraca weighs only a few ounces. No maraca could inflict such a wound as Estralita received. Her skull was bashed in!"

"That's right," I conceded. "No one could cave in another's skull with a maraca—a *normal* maraca. But if that maraca was weighted—"

"Weighted!"

"Exactly. Suppose the round ball of the maraca had been filled with chunks of iron. Having a handle to grip it with, it would make a very handy club. Better than a blackjack."

"Good God," breathed Swan. "You might have something there."

"It would explain a lot of things. We have been wondering why the killer would steal a maraca. Well, if he had used it as a murder weapon—and if it had blood and hair on it, and maybe even fingerprints—that would be sufficient reason for him to remove it from the scene of the crime, wouldn't it?"

Miranda milked his chin. "Perhaps you are right, senor; it's an interesting theory. But since the maraca couldn't have been weighted when Estralita did her dance, when did the killer find an opportunity to load it?"

I shrugged. "I don't know how it was done, or when it was done, or even if it was done. But there's enough logic to it to give it some consideration."

Which was true. It accounted for the theft of the maraca, purely on the basis that any smart killer would remove the murder weapon from the scene of his crime.

WE LEFT Miranda to play with the new idea. That's all he did, too, was play with it.

Nothing happened the rest of that day. Nothing happened the next day either. When I called Miranda on the third day following the murder, he still hadn't done much. Oh, he'd had Orlando on the carpet, trying to pin the killing on him. And he'd talked to everyone in the *Bamboo Club* show, with no results, but hadn't yet talked to Sebastian Lujan.

"You're scared of the guy because he has sugar!" I snorted.

"He does not own a sugar plantation—"

"I mean money!" I roared. "Why the hell don't you drag him on the carpet and make him squirm. He's in this somewhere, I'm sure of it. Even if he isn't the killer, he's in it somewhere."

"I do not wish to question him, senor, until I have more evidence. I am running this case, and while I appreciate your help, you are not indispensable to me."

I said, "Okay, the hell with it then," and hung up. I was sizzling inside. Miranda was dragging his feet because the eminent Lujan was too big to touch. I had an impulse to throw up my hands and bow out of the case—but I couldn't force myself to that extreme. I had known Estralita before she had

become Estralita, and there was a tugging compulsion inside of me to see this thing through.

Which was probably why I found myself irresistably walking in the direction of Estralita's apartment that afternoon. I wasn't sure what, if anything, I was looking for. But I wanted to go there, see if anything had been overlooked, get a fresh glance at the murder room—and maybe something, some little previously overlooked something, might make sense.

When I got off the elevator on the fourth floor I noticed that Estralita's door was ajar. I crossed over and peered inside. The Cuban cop was sitting in a chair smoking an Havana cigar while he watched another man in the room with quizzical eyes. The other man was Johnny Swan. He was moping around the room like a lost artist, still carrying his bulging briefcase of unfinished work.

I said, "Did you have the same idea?"

Swan turned slowly. When he recognized me the contagious smile spread across his face. With his free hand he shoved back his turbulent hair. "Hi, Mike. I'm just looking."

"For what?"

"I don't know. Anything—or nothing. The damned room fascintes me. I've got a feeling there ought to be something here."

The Cuban cop stood up. I guess he thought he was having a lot of visitors to a room he was supposed to let no one into. The cop wore an armband which indicated he was an English-speaking Cuban.

"I tell him we search everywhere and find nothing," he said sadly.

I STEPPED inside. The cop was right, of course. They had gone over everything with great care. There was no point, really, for either Swan or me to re-examine it. Yet Swan had felt the way I had—that there ought to be a key to the puzzle in Estralita's room.

The room was the same as when I had last seen it, except that Estralita's body had been removed. Even the blood-stained pillow was in its place. I looked at the irregular stain of blood, now hard and brownish, and felt a little sick inside.

Two articles lay on the dresser near the bed—the alligator skin pouch with the draw string top and the lone golden maraca which had nestled close to Estralita's dead body. I looked at the pouch. It was a nonentity. Did it have anything to do with the murder? What had Estralita used the pouch for? Probably some harmless thing like hairpins and nail polish and cosmetics when she traveled. And the lone maraca was nothing, either—it was the missing one that meant something, not this one.

Swan and I finally left the place feeling frustrated and headed for a bar and a Cuban beer.

"The whole case is bogging," I told him. "Miranda is sitting on his hands, and every street I go down has a blind alley."

Swan made little round marks on the bar with his moist glass. He looked thoughtful. "Miranda's afraid to move on this. He's letting it drift, figuring he'll either hang it on Orlando or let it blow over so he can pigeon-hole it."

"I'm not pigeon-holing it, Johnny," I said grimly. "I'm going to find the son that killed Estralita."

Swan held out his hand and I shook it. "You and me both," he said. "Let's upset the whole Cuban constabulary!" He laughed delightedly at the prospect.

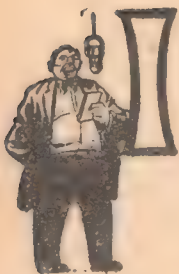
"So where do we go from here?" I asked.

Swan pursed his lips. "You know, I think we ought to forget it for one evening. We're all fouled up, nothing makes sense. We're not thinking straight. We can't see the forest because the damn trees are in the way. So why not relax tonight and get it off our minds?" He warmed suddenly to his own idea. "Tell you what! Drop over to the apartment

at seven. We'll have a couple snifters and then take in the jai alai game. Then we'll go back to my place and kill a fifth, and maybe play some good old American poker."

It sounded like an exceptional idea.

- 5 -



ARRIVED at Swan's apartment—which was within walking distance of my hotel—at precisely seven. Someone was just coming out of the main entrance, so I caught the door before it closed and went up

to his room without buzzing him first. Swan's room was on three at the end of hall.

I didn't have to knock on the door—it was wide open. I walked into the tiny foyer he has and stopped abruptly. Swan was sprawled ungracefully on the floor of his living room. There was a little blood—not much—matting his sandy hair at the base of his skull, and a trickle had run down his neck to the greenish carpet underneath him. His one hand was flung out ahead of him as if he'd tried to break his fall. He lay very still.

I sucked in my breath. Estralita—and now Swan? I dropped next to him, felt quickly for a pulse. It was there, beating rhythmically, stronger than I'd expected. I jumped up, went into the kitchen, came back with a shallow basin of water. Then I went to work on him. I rolled him over, sopped him with the H₂O, until he began to stir feebly.

Finally his eyes popped open, stared at me unseeingly for a few seconds, then closed.

"Johnny! You hear me, Johnny?"

He was quite a lad, at that. He opened his eyes and forced a wiry grin. "How the hell can I help it? Quit shouting."

He propped himself up on an elbow and gazed around the room. For the first time I looked around too. The room was a shambles.

"Someone went over the place," Swan commented unnecessarily.

It was true. The entire living room was topsy-turvy. Drawers in the end tables had been rifled, the rug had been turned up, lamps tipped over. The cushions of the couch and easy chair had been split open and the cotton stuffing pulled out and scattered wildly about. Even Swan's briefcase, next to him on the floor, had been opened, the papers strewn carelessly about.

Swan staggered to his feet. He was thinking all-right, because he crossed to his smoking cabinet and took the bottle of bourbon and poured himself a king-size shot. Then he offered it to me. I duplicated his effort.

What happened?" I asked.

"Damned if I know," he said. "I came home from the office at six. That must have been an hour ago—right?"

"Yes."

"Well, I came in and saw that the living room had been ransacked. I guess I stood in the middle of the room, staring at it. That's when he hit me."

"Who?"

"How the hell should I know? The guy came up in back of me and clobbered me. One sock and I was down. That's all I remember."

IGAZED around the disheveled room. It made sense.

"He must have been in your apartment, searching it. When he heard you coming he stepped back into that closet over there." There was a closet near the door. "When you came in, he steps out of the closet and lets you have it."

"Probably only because he wanted to get away unseen," I said. "If he had wanted to kill you, he could have easily completed the job. Instead, he whacked you once and beat it—just so he could get away unrecognized."

Swan nodded. We walked over to-

gether and looked into the bedroom. It was as bad as the living room. Everything had been pulled out of drawers and closets and strewn on the floor. The bed mattress was ripped and the innards yanked out.

Swan said, "How's my head?"

I told him the skin had been cut slightly and a little blood was in his hair. Other than that, he was A-1. He grinned wryly, loped into the kitchen and took some gingerale out of the frij, ambled back to the bourbon and mixed two.

"The hell with the jai alai game," I said. "What was he after, Swan?"

"Eh?"

"What was the guy looking for?"

Swan pulled at the highball. "That's what kills me; I don't know what he was looking for."

"Valuables?"

"Who, me?" He grinned. "I'm just a private dick. You know they don't make any money."

"What, then?"

"I don't know what, then! Damn it, Mike—what *would* the guy want in my apartment?"

"Maybe just a prowler," I said.

"In the daytime? It doesn't stack."

"Then maybe, if there's nothing valuable here, he was looking for information."

"What kind of information?"

I shrugged. I looked at the overturned briefcase with the papers spilled out. "One of your cases, maybe?"

He shook his head. "Look, Mike. I haven't had a case in a month that was important enough for anybody to ransack an apartment to find dope on. Believe me."

"I was just thinking out loud," I said. "There's a natural tendency to tie this up with Estralita's death, but they may be unrelated. I was just talking."

Swan felt his head gingerly. "I feel whoozy."

That was my cue. I drained my glass, stood up.

"You'd better go to bed," I told him. "I'll phone you in the morning."

He protested, but I left anyway. There would be no jai alai game or no fifth of bourbon or no poker tonight. I went back to the hotel thinking that, somehow, Estralita's death and Swan's mugging must be connected. But there was no string that actually tied the two—or was there? A sudden, bright thought slithered through my mind, and I felt embarrassed that I hadn't thought of it before. Yes, there was a string—a tenuous string, hardly a string at all. But a string!

I WENT TO bed thinking about it. I woke up with the telephone on the night stand jangling in my ear. I reached over, knocked the clock over, but finally uncradled the receiver and squawked a sleepy hello.

"This is Senor Tenner?"

"Yes." I glanced at the overturned clock. It was exactly midnight.

"This is Orlando. I am most sorry to bother you, but—"

"What is it?" I had a midnight impatience in my voice. Besides, Orlando's sounded urgent.

"I've found the missing maraca," he said.

That pulled me right out of bed; I swung my legs down, sat up.

"Where is it, Orlando?"

"I'm at the *Bamboo Club*," he rattled excitedly. "We cancelled the Miami engagement. We have just finished our first show. I am dancing with a new partner and she is not as good as Estralita—"

"Where's the maraca?" I wailed. His chatter was unnerving me.

"I am coming to that, senor. After the show I returned to my dressing room. To my great surprise the golden maraca was on my dressing table."

"To your great surprise," I said.

"Exactly, senor," he said.

"Why didn't you call the police instead of me?"

I could almost see the repugnance on

Orlando's gigolo face as he answered. "I am most unhappy about Inspector Miranda. He would take this as more evidence to say I killed Estralita. I preferred to contact you—at first anyway."

"Okay, Orlando," I said. "Hold everything and I'll be right over."

I banged down the phone, jumped into my pants and shirt and jacket. On second thought, I dug a Luger out of my luggage and strapped it around my chest under the jacket. Why, I don't know—except that somehow I felt that things might be reaching a climax.

There was the thread-like string between Estralita's murder and the attack on Johnny Swan—and now this. And it was beginning to tie together now, to make sense. The jagged pieces of the jigsaw were beginning to dovetail.

I called Swan. He sounded disturbed, but when I told him what had happened he brightened up.

"Meet me at the *Bamboo* as soon as you can get there," I said. "This is beginning to shake up."

WE ARRIVED simultaneously. Swan looked sleepy, but outside of that he was all right. The *Bamboo Club* was still going full blast—I am sure that Cubans never sleep—and we did an adagio dance between the tables to reach Orlando's dressing room. He was sitting on a stool at the dressing table, drumming his thin fingers nervously. The maraca—the missing golden maraca—lay on the dressing table, looking very innocent and unimportant.

"You're sure this wasn't here before your act?" I asked.

Orlando shook his head. "No. I sat at the dressing table before my act; I would have seen it."

"So it was put there during the act?"

"Yes, senor."

I picked up the maraca. It was light, weighing only a few ounces. If it had ever been used as a weapon to crush the skull of Estralita, there was no evidence of it now.

I took the ball of the maraca in my left hand and the handle in my right, then proceeded to loosen the handle. After a few turns the handle came out, leaving a small hole in the ball where it had been inserted. Through the hole I dumped the contents of the maraca on the dressing table.

Pebbles.

"Seems normal," I said. "Ordinary pebbles used in all maracas to make the swishing noise."

Johnny Swan combed his hair with his fingers. He looked puzzled. "Doesn't look like a murder weapon, does it?"

"Not now. If it was used as a weapon, then whatever was used to add weight to it has been removed and the pebbles replaced. Also, it's been cleaned up—the blood and hair removed. Regardless of those possibilities, however, it still doesn't strike me as a vicious weapon."

Swan shrugged. "Then why'd the killer lam off with it?"

I grinned. Another idea had been born in my mind last night, and now, with the finding of the maraca, it was assuming new importance. It came spilling out in half-eager words.

"It's a good question, Swan," I said. "Why, indeed, would a killer steal a perfectly innocent maraca? Why would he murder to obtain it?"

"Why, senor?" Orlando was looking at me as if he thought I was Sherlock Holmes.

"The killer would murder for this maraca only if it was in some way valuable to him—valuable enough to commit murder for. In other words, isn't it possible that the maraca stolen from Estralita's apartment had inside of it, not weights, but something valuable?"

Swan looked startled. Orlando licked his lips.

"What, for example?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. Dope, maybe. Heroin. You could carry a fortune in heroin inside a maraca ball."

Swan motioned at the maraca. "But it contained only pebbles."

"It contains only pebbles *now*," I told him. "It may have contained something valuable before now."

Swan shoved his hair back again. I started to pace the floor, the way I do when an idea excites me."

"Let's assume the maraca had something in it of immense value to the killer. All right. Then he has done one of two things. One, he may have salvaged the material from the maraca, refilled it with pebbles, and planted it here with some idea of throwing additional suspicion on Orlando. Two—and this is most important—he may have picked up the *wrong* maraca in Estralita's room."

"What!"

I felt suddenly a-quiver inside. This idea was too good, too good.

"Don't you see? Suppose the killer hit Estralita over the head to obtain one of the two golden maracas—filled with something valuable. Then suppose he picked up the wrong maraca by mistake. That would mean that this wrong maraca was filled only with the pebbles we have here—but that the *right* maraca, the valuable maraca, is the one *still in Estralita's room!*"

"Good God!" said Swan. "Do you suppose—"

I swung toward Orlando. "Where's Lujan's office?"

His Latin eyes widened. But he responded quickly. He motioned me to follow and led the way down the long hall to a door at the end which said, Manager. We didn't bother to knock, we went right in.

THE OFFICE was luxuriously furnished, but that made no impression at the moment. The fact that it was empty did make an impression. Sebastian Lujan was not there.

"There's just a chance," I said, walking to his desk which set in one corner of the room.

"Are you out of your mind, Mike?" Swan wanted to know.

But I was paying no attention. I examined the top of his desk first. Nothing. Then his chair. Nothing. Then the carpet beneath his desk.

Something.

A tiny pebbles, exactly like those that had been in the golden maraca!

"That's it!" I said.

"I don't get it," Swan said simply.

I held the pebble under his nose. "See it? A pebble from the maraca. That means the maraca was opened in this room and, when Lujan found it contained only pebbles, he returned them to the maraca. He probably scraped them off the edge of his desk into the little hole in the maraca ball—and dropped this one in the process. Then he put the maraca in Orlando's dressing room during his act."

Swan looked half grim, half eager. "Lujan, eh?" He was savoring the thought.

"Sure," I said. "Lujan discovered tonight that he had the wrong maraca. So where do you suppose he's gone now?"

A glimmer sprang into Swan's eyes. He pushed back his haystack hair.

"He's gone to get the other one!"

I didn't stay around to discuss it. I said, "Come on, Johnny, we've got work to do." And we hightailed it.

- 6 -



ESTRALITA'S apartment was not far from the *Bamboo Club*, and we covered the distance in a matter of minutes. On the way, Swan recollected his wits.

"It doesn't sound right," he said. "If Lujan killed Estralita to obtain something valuable in the maraca, then discovered he had the wrong one, wouldn't he have gone back to get it before now?"

I shook my head. "He had to wait, don't you see? Miranda had a cop

guarding the room all this time, and there was no way for him to go back and get the other maraca. Until now."

"You mean—"

"I'm not sure, but I'll bet my last peso Miranda took the guard off this evening. He said he was going to soon."

I heard Swan suck air between his teeth. He shoved his car down the narrow one-way streets with complete recklessness, the radiator nose pointed toward the murder room.

"Lujan has a key to the apartment," I said. "He may enter that way, or he may figure it's less dangerous to enter by the fire-escape. Better stop near the alley."

The latter guess proved right. We braked near the alley and I immediately saw the long black sedan standing under the fire-escape. It was the same big car we'd seen in front of Lujan's home. It had gold-plated hubcaps!

"He's there!"

It wasn't much of a job to clambor over the radiator of the big sedan to the roof, then grab the hanging fire-escape ladder and swing up. I went first, followed by Swan.

As I climbed the iron-slatted stairs I tugged the gun out of my shoulder holster. It felt cool and firm in my hand, and it gave me confidence. I kept peering upward into the blackness overhead to spot Lujan if he should start to descend, but he didn't. When we reached Estralita's window we found it open. I swung a leg over the sill and slid inside, the gun leveled.

"You're covered, Lujan," I said. "Put up your chubby paws."

He was standing at the dresser, leaning over slightly, the broad expanse of his back toward me. At sound of my voice he straightened slowly and his fat hands started to raise upward, as though reaching for the ceiling. He turned slowly around, pivoting on his heel and toe like a soldier doing an about-face. It was Lujan, of course, and his scared-doe eyes were now nar-

rowed to evil slits in the puffiness of his face.

A quick glance showed me that the golden maraca—the all-important *other* maraca—still lay on the dresser. Obviously Lujan had been bent over it when I'd surprised him, I motioned with the Luger.

"Over on the bed, Lujan. Sit down."

HE MOVED heavily to the bed and sat down, the springs sagging under his immense weight. I flicked on a lamp near the bed and grinned down at him.

"It must have been a big surprise to you when you opened that maraca in your office and found only pebbles," I said. "You knew, then, that you had the wrong one—and that the right one was here in Estralita's room. So you came to get it."

I was bluffing, of course; I didn't know what was in the maraca on the dresser. I didn't even know if there was anything in it. But from the expression on Lujan's round face I knew I'd struck a jarring note.

"Open up that maraca, Johnny," I said to Swan. "And dump out the contents."

If nothing came out but pebbles, I was going to look mighty sick!

Swan unscrewed the handle carefully, then dumped the insides through the hole in the ball. Pebbles rattled out, but there was something else too. They clattered out on the dresser top—sparkling white, glimmering stones.

Diamonds!

Maybe a hundred thousand dollars worth!

I turned toward Lujan, and the suspicion I had formed in my mind was a truism now. "Clever," I said. "A neat setup. Smuggling diamonds into the States—stolen diamonds you had to get rid of. Smuggling them to a fence in the States by placing them inside of Estralita's golden maracas. A perfect deal, with Estralita running the stuff for

you. You know, I got to wondering why she appeared nervous when heading for the States but not when she returned to Cuba. And when I recalled that she had once before been mixed up with a smuggler—Louie Goon, the heroin boy—I began to suspect that maybe the reason she was so upset was the tension she was under in smuggling something into the States past the customs inspectors.

"Anyway, Estralita was the runner, and since the customs boys knew she was a dancer who commuted between two nightclubs, they probably passed her through without even inspecting her baggage much. Certainly, they never went to the extreme of opening up the maracas, which they knew were part of her theatrical costume. There wasn't even any difference in noise, if the maracas rattled. Diamonds rattle just like pebbles—eh, Lujan?"

Lujan's fat face had faded to a dough-like color, but there was defiance in his attitude. Defiance he had cultivated during a long career of being rich and politically powerful in politically emotional Cuba.

"I can get out of this!" he railed. "I've got good lawyers!"

"And you've got money too, Lujan—don't forget that. And maybe here in Cuba money can buy you freedom, I wouldn't know. But there's a difference between beating a smuggling charge and—murder."

HIS FAT jaw wavered as his mouth tried to form words and failed. Finally he spit them out.

"Let's get one thing straight, Senor Tenner. Perhaps I was smuggling stolen diamonds; other jewels too, perhaps. and perhaps Estralita did run them for me—for her cut. All this you may be able to prove. But I didn't kill Estralita! I loved her. I didn't kill her, do you hear?"

"I hear," I said.

"Then you must believe, too, that

I did not kill her, but I can tell you who did!"

I looked at him. Finally I said, "Yes, Lujan, I believe you can. I believe you've known who killed her from the night of her murder. But you couldn't tell the police, even to clear yourself of suspicion, because you would have become involved on the smuggling angle."

I toyed with the gun, idly, lackadaisically, as if I might press the trigger at any time, for fun or by accident. Lujan started sweating, the globules forming on his thick brow.

"Let's reconstruct it from the beginning," I said. "Your smuggling setup with Estralita running the stuff was a cushy little racket until another man got wise to it. So this other guy decided to get in on the act by relieving Estralita of her next cache. From fifty to a hundred thousand bucks worth of jewels was worth a little extraordinary effort. So this other man waited until he knew Estralita was bound for the States again with a load. Then he waited in her apartment—he must have had a key to it too, just as you had, and probably many others—and when she came home from the *Bamboo Club* a few nights ago, he was ready for her.

"She undressed first, while he hid in a deep closet out of sight. You had given her the diamonds in an alligator-skin pouch with a draw string. She unfastened the golden maracas from the belt she wore in her act, and opened one of the maracas up and put the diamonds in. Then she screwed the handle back on and, for an instant, must have had the two maracas laying side-by-side on the bed. That's when the killer hit her. Maybe he didn't even intend to kill her, but his blow was too savage. Anyway, she fell across the bed and the murderer, in his haste, grabbed up the wrong maraca and fled."

Lujan's face was an immobile mask.

Swan looked puzzled. "It doesn't ring a bell, Mike," he said. "The killer would have certainly kept his eye on

the maraca he wanted. He must have known which one it was on the bed before he hit her, otherwise he would have taken them both."

I nodded. "That's right. He knew which was which. But remember that Estralita, after she was hit, fell across the bed. The maracas rolled down into the despression caused by the weight of her body. We found one of them there, you'll recall. And in rolling down toward her body—in the violence of her fall on the bed—the maracas must have *changed position*. And the killer, not knowing this because his attention was momentarily occupied with delivering the blow, picked up the wrong maraca when he left, secure in the feeling that he had the right one!"

Swan nodded. "It sounds logical."

I TURNED back to Lujan. "You had a great big oversized yen for Estralita, and since she was going to be away from you for a week or so in Miami, you decided to give her a big juicy surprise by visiting her in her room. You arrived just as the killer completed his job. The killer descended by means of the fire-escape—it would be less dangerous that way—and you must have seen him going down. Right?"

Lujan nodded heavily. "Yes, senor. I did see the killer. The moon was bright that night and I recognized him." His eyes were on me steadily, his breath coming in even, ponderous sounds.

"You don't need to tell me, Lujan," I said. "I already know." I backed up a step, swung the Luger so it covered both Lujan and Swan. I said, "You killed her, Swan. You were the other man who learned—through Estralita, probably—of Lujan's racket. You decided to cut in. You came up to steal the diamonds—and killed Estralita when you struck her."

He was staring at me, his mouth half open. His tangled hair gave him a wild, look, and his voice was husky when he

spoke. "Mike—are you—crazy?"

"Not at all, Johnny. You killed her. I suspected it, because there were several things that pointed to you. Let me go on. You killed her and fled with the wrong maraca. Lujan saw you, recognized you, but couldn't say anything. His job was to quietly get his diamonds back. Anyway, when you opened the maraca at home and found it full of pebbles only, you must have felt pretty low. You decided you simply had to get that other maraca. So you allied yourself with me in the investigation of Estralita's death, which made it seem logical for you to visit Estralita's room. That explains your curious interest in the murder room and the fact that you carried a bulging briefcase with you. You had the wrong maraca in the briefcase all the time, and you went to Estralita's room several times intending to switch maracas if you got a chance. But Inspector Miranda's guard was too close on your tail, and you never got that chance.

"It was your curious interest in the room, plus the briefcase you carried, that made me suspicious of your motives. I didn't know why you were so curious about the room, or why you carried a briefcase, but it was a suspicious act that got me to wondering a little. Of course, the briefcase is easily explained now—where else could you carry a maraca unseen? It would bulge a pocket too noticeably; it had to be carried in something big and bulky—hence the bulging briefcase."

Johnny Swan's face had gone white under my words, but he said two words with a show of defiance. "Pretty slim."

"Maybe; but there's more. Let's go on. Lujan, of course, knew you had stolen the maraca. He didn't know you'd stolen the wrong one. He figured you had the diamond-filled maraca—so he bided his time a few days, knowing you wouldn't try to peddle them very soon, and then he decided to go to your apartment and get them. He

went there and turned the place upside-down, without finding them. But just then you came in with your briefcase—and Lujan slugged you. He found the maraca in your briefcase, took it, and went back to the *Bamboo Club*. Right, Lujan?"

Lujan didn't answer. He licked his thick lips and tried to get away from my gaze. It was obvious from his actions that I'd hit the truth.

"THE REST is easy," I said. "Lujan, you took the maraca back to your office in the *Bamboo Club* and opened it. Imagine your surprise when you found only pebbles in it! That was when you figured the whole thing out. You realized, then, that Swan had picked up the wrong maraca—and you decided the right one was still in Estralita's room. You decided to go after it, figuring probably that the guard had been taken off by this time.

"But you didn't go right away; you saw a chance to kill two birds with one stone. You knew that Estralita and Orlando had had a tiff the last night she was alive, and that Miranda was looking upon Orlando with very suspicious eyes, so you decided to plant the maraca you had in his dressing room. You were gambling, of course, that somebody besides Orlando would see it and that word would get to the police that the missing maraca had shown up in Orlando's room. Anyway, you couldn't plant the maraca until Orlando was doing his number. So you patiently waited until that time and then, after planting it, you hightailed it for here. Your misfortune was that Orlando called me instead of the police and I realized the same thing you had—that the maraca with the valuable contents was here, and that you had come to get it."

I turned to Swan. He was looking slightly sick, his face turning a yellowish color. "I had begun to be suspicious of you, as I've said, because of your

fascination for the murder room and the fact that you carried the bulging briefcase. But it was after you were hit on the head and your room ransacked that I began to get a glimmer of the truth. I began to ask myself, 'What was the attacker looking for?'. I found the answer in Orlando's dressing room.

"You see, it was in his room that I discarded the idea that the maraca had been used as a weapon to kill Estralita. When I found the maraca in Orlando's room the truth began to dawn—a truth that had been in the back of my mind for some time but had never quite taken shape. Namely, that the maraca had been stolen from Estralita because it had something valuable inside. The rest was step-by-step deduction. I found that Lujan had obviously planted the maraca in Orlando's room. Question—where had Lujan gotten the maraca? Had he killed Estralita and taken it?

"Certain facts said no. One, he had not seemed to be carrying anything as bulky as a maraca when I met him at the elevator on the night of Estralita's murder. Two, he weighs some 300 pounds, and there seemed no place in Estralita's room—including the closet—where he could have hid while she got undressed and filled the maraca. Three, if he had taken the maraca from the scene of the crime at the time of the crime, he would have opened it long before tonight and discovered he had the wrong one—and evidence seemed to indicate that Lujan had only recently come into possession of the maraca, only recently opened it in his office and planted it in Orlando's room.

"Next question—where had he come into possession of the maraca? The answer was obvious—he had stolen it from you, Swan, when he clobbered you on the head and ransacked your apartment. You had stolen it from Estralita after hitting her over the head, and Lujan had seen you escaping and thus knew right where to go to retrieve the maraca." I grinned at both of them.

"And just think, boys—Estralita's murder, the slugging of Swan, everything was done over the *wrong maraca!*"

IT WAS AN ironic twist, and I was feeling like Sherlock Holmes, Philo Vance and Ellery Queen all rolled up in one for having figured it out. I guess I was feeling entirely too good, because I didn't see Lujan suddenly go for a gun.

Swan saw him, though, and Swan had always been quick on the draw. His gun leaped into his hand and he fired three shots at Lujan. As he squeezed the second shot off I let my Luger yammer in his direction.

Lujan and Swan both did a slow tumble to the floor, and Swan's gun clattered a couple feet away from him.

I glanced at Lujan. He was sitting against the bed, looking like some misplaced Buddha. His eyes were bulging and his round mouth was open, and he was twitching spasmodically. One chubby hand lay across his fat stomach, and he was watching in disbelief as blood oozed through his stubby fingers. Then he sighed once and rolled over on his side.

I looked at Swan. His was a shoulder wound, but a bad one. His shoulder

was spouting blood like a miniature fountain, and his eyes looked a little glassy and unreal.

"The murder weapon?" I asked, glancing at the gun.

He didn't answer. But he didn't have to. The butt of the gun could very easily have caved in Estralita's delicious head. "I'm sorry it had to be you," I said.

"You're a helluva friend," he answered.

I just looked at him. For a second I felt sorry for him. He was such a nice guy, really, a nice friendly smiling guy. But he'd seen a hundred thousand dollars worth of ice in front of his eyes, and he hadn't been able to resist. And then, quite suddenly, I didn't feel sorry for him at all. Because I saw Estralita again, attired in the flimsy seductive nightgown because she'd been expecting me, and she was sprawled ungracefully across the bed, and her jet black hair was soaked with blood that ran down her smooth white neck to the pillow. Estralita—warm, vibrant, full of life, waiting for me—and as Orlando would have said, Swan had killed the wench dead.

I crossed to the phone to call Inspector Miranda.



3 SUSPENSEFUL MYSTERIES

FATAL WEDDING

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DOUBLE ACTION

DETECTIVE STORIES

Quiz Feature

CELEBRATED SLEUTHS OF FICTION

by Elise M. Brennen

THERE are many great authors of detective fiction and some of their characters have become familiar. Everyone knows the "Elementary, my dear Watson" a favorite expression of Sherlock Holmes, who was, of course, created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

How well do you know your fictional detectives? Below is a list of authors and books in which the detective solves the case; can you name the sleuth?

1. Edgar Allan Poe, the inventor of the American detective story created a detective called _____ in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue".
2. An oriental detective, exuding calm and wisdom, named _____ appeared in Earl Derr Biggers "Behind that Curtain".
3. Prior to Sherlock Holmes, an outstanding detective of Great Britain was introduced by Wilkie Collins in "The Moonstone". He is _____.
4. A Frenchman, Emile Gaboriau developed a detective named _____ "File No. 113" who is the Sherlock Holmes of French literature.
5. Charles Dickens in "Bleak House" introduced _____.
6. A Frenchman with a large umbrella is _____ in Agatha Christie's "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd".
7. S. S. Van Dine focuses on upper-class crime in The "Canary" Murder case and the one who solves the case is _____.
8. A French reporter named _____ says to his assistant "Look here, Sainclair" in "Mystery of the Yellow Room" by Gaston Leroux.
9. Anton Chekhov created a Russian detective named _____ in "The Safety Match".
10. A bald, scholarly forehead is a characteristic of _____ in "The Dream Detective" by Sax Rohmer.
11. In "The Case of the Shoplifter's Shoe" by Erle Stanley Gardner, the fact that _____ has legal knowledge turns the trick.
12. A comical detective is _____ created by Dorothy Sayers in "The Nine Tailors". (He also has a title). It's a joke!
13. Now dig this one. A private eye known as _____ in Dashiell Hammett's "The Maltese Falcon".
14. This one is hard as nails. He appears in "I the Jury" by Mickey Spillane just call him _____.
15. Rex Stout in "Fer-de-Lance" has a fat sleuth named _____.
16. This one isn't simple. He's _____ in "The Avenging Saint" by Leslie Chateris.
17. He constantly puffs a pipe in George Simenon's "Liberty Bar". _____.
18. A professor in chemistry, named _____ solves "The Silent Bullet" by Arthur B. Reeve.
19. In 1878, in "The Leavenworth Case" Anna Katherine Green introduced Detective _____.
20. Henry K. Webster in "The Whispering Man" creates a character named _____ who has a peculiar vocal defect.

(Answers are on page 98).



Kirk Lowe never saw the girl...

BLONDE MANTRAP

Girls were Kirk Lowe's weakness, especially brown-eyed blondes, and he liked the kind of weaknesses they often had. Only Jacquie Jayne was the kind who broke men's hearts with bullets.

by WADE B. RUBOTTOM

WITH ALL-OUT effort, Private Investigator Kirk Lowe tried to chin himself on the sharp brink of blackout—and failed. When next his eyes focused, he looked up into the merciful face of a blonde angel.

On earth, girls had always been his weakness, and he had loved 'em for it. Now in heaven with his tortured head resting in this angel's soft lap, with her gentle hand applying a wet handkerchief to his pulsing brow, he was disappointed. In his imagination, heaven had never tolerated pain.

"Easy now, Mr. Lowe." The angelic voice filled his ears, soothed him. You'll be all right. When I hit you, I didn't know who you were. I thought...."

Again Kirk was disappointed—this time at hearing bald-faced lies in Heaven. Angels can't hit hard. Just in case *this* one could, he pushed his dizzy five-foot-ten frame to its knees then to its feet. Hastily he backed away—before she slugged him again.

For the third time, he was disappointed. He *wasn't* in heaven.

He remembered now, where he was and why he had come. He remembered tagging this client's request to meet him in Centinela Park on a rain-predicted night—unusual. But he had shrugged his bulging shoulders and mumbled, "So what?" At thirty-eight, he knew tender scruples seldom win arguments with thin wallets.

Besides, he had never learned to say no to an alluring voice. And this allur-

ing voice hadn't given him time. She had given him the telephone number of the pay booth she was using. "...It's in Centinela Park, but I don't know where." She urged him to hurry and hung up. The telephone company told him where the booth was and how to get there.

He suspected that he was just a hired patsy. But his curiosity had been awakened, and his palm itched for eating dough. He'd find out what this was all about, and he'd see it through in his usual Lowe manner.

They stood under a giant-limbed live oak. A high park light cast a black-limbed pattern on the ground. The telephone booth this girl had called from stood alongside a rest room building.

"It you're Jacquie Jayne," Kirk's brains seemed to rattle loosely in his head as he talked, "Let me tell you that my clients generally don't greet me so forcefully."

"I'm sorry," she continued beating dust from her tweed skirt—low heeled shoes didn't rob beauty from her slim legs, "but you said, you'd be wearing a light trench coat."

"It wasn't raining, so I left it in the car. What did you hit me with?"

Cowardly, he backed away at sight of the oak limb she held up. She tried to tempt him closer. "Here's your wallet. I checked your ID papers."

"Toss it here," he said, not trusting the hand that held the oak cudgel. He caught the wallet and without a

glance jammed it into his coat pocket. Anything she might have taken wasn't worth risking another blow. Cautiously he felt under his left arm. Immediately he felt a little safer—she hadn't taken his .38.

"Get me out of here," the girl demanded. "Then I'll tell you what I can. I was kidnapped."

Kirk saw his fee flee. "Kidnapping is a job for the police. The FBI."

"No!" She dropped her oak cudgel and backed away with her hands fisted at her mouth—as if he had suggested calling in the Soviet G.P.U.

HE TOUCHED her elbow and started her toward his car.

"I don't trust the police," she said sadly; "all I've ever gotten from them are tongue lashings and traffic tickets. I don't want *them* snooping around."

"You should meet Det. Lt. Tom Travis of homicide," Kirk said vaguely. Then he went to work: "Why would anyone kidnap you?"

"I don't know—maybe he was a sex-fiend."

Now under a light where he had parked his car, Kirk saw that this blonde was about five-feet-four and a beautifully tempting dish. Apparently one guy had found her tempting enough to try his hand at kidnap. Personally, Kirk liked the way she reminded him of the Grand Tetons.

Soon as he got her and himself in his old Chrysler, she said, "Get out of this Park then circle around to Centinela Boulevard. I want to pick up my car."

Kirk swung his Chrysler. "How did *your* car get here?"

"I came to meet this man."

"What! You came to meet a body-snatcher?"

"No, the man I came to meet didn't show. Someone else—the kidnapper—Oh, I don't know!"

"Well, who did you come to meet?"

"I—I can't tell you."

Kirk braked his car. "Get this! If you expect help from me, you'll tell me all you know. Everything. From all indications, that won't take long. Get started."

"I guess you're right." She sounded milk-meek now. "Well, this man phoned—said he'd let me have a few marijuana cigarettes. I—"

"You use 'em?"

"Just now and then—for *kicks*." Her tone was defensive. "It's not a habit. When I got here, he insisted that I go with him to a cache. We circled until I was completely lost. Then I discovered that he didn't have any marijuana. He had got me out here for something else. He—he—" She couldn't go on. She held a handkerchief to her eyes. Her shoulders shook. Her whole body trembled.

Kirk had always preferred blondes with brown eyes, and he felt a great pity for this one. Unconsciously, he repeated her advice to him: "Easy, now, Miss Jayne." He patted her shoulder.

Then he flared. She wasn't crying. "I'll join you—soon as you tell me what's so damn funny. I'm a character; I like to know what I'm laughing at."

SHE GOT control of herself and said as if she meant it, "I'm sorry. But this screwball pulled a gun. He forced me too sign a check. He had it made out, payable to cash. A fifteen-thousand dollar check on my bank! Then he locked me in that telephone booth—after taking all my change, he thought. Fortunately he overlooked a quarter. He used the oak limb I clubbed you with to jam the phone booth door shut. Well, I was torn between claustrophobia and fear: he'd kill me if he couldn't jam the door."

"From the private detective listing in the yellow directory, I selected your name—because I liked its sound. After talking with you, I jiggled the



"In six months, you'll be broke, and a bum, baby."

door until the oak limb fell free. Then I waited among the shadows afraid to move." She sighed wearily.

"If this man didn't harm you physically," Kirk said, kindly, "you have nothing to worry about. The bank won't honor that check—unless you have 15 grand in your account. At any rate, you can stop payment—first thing tomorrow morning."

"But I *do* have 15,000 in my account. That's what's strange about this. Who would know that I just deposited \$15,000—insurance from my father's accidental death in Chicago? But I wasn't worried about signing that check. As you say, I can stop payment—that's what's so funny. Now I want you at the bank. I want to know who tries to cash that check."

Kirk wanted to know that and a lot more; and he hoped to know before tomorrow morning. All he believed of this girl's story could be printed on ticker tape in 18 point extended and extrabold type and stuffed into a sleeping pill capsule.

He got his Chrysler underway again. "We'll find your car, I'll follow you home." He offered cigarets then asked, "What's your friend look like?"

"I didn't see much of him. He's six to eight inches taller than me. A dark grey felt hat shadowed his face. He wore a mustache. And once I got a

fleeting glimpse of his nose—while he was jamming the phone booth door. It had a definite break in it—like Dick Tracy's in the comic strip. He had a peculiar voice—as if he were holding his nose."

"Anything else?"

"Yes. He was rather thin for his height, and he wore old grey suede gloves. The black stitching on the back of the left one was frayed—I noticed it as he held the check for me to sign."

"HMMMMM," Kirk said, noncommittally. She had described the guy well—perhaps too well. Perhaps more like a trained cop than like—"What kind of work do you do, Miss Jayne?"

"I'm a fashion model—mostly swimsuits, bras, lingerie. Why?"

"I like to know my clients," Kirk grinned; "especially my model clients."

"How nice." Her voice flashed him back to heaven with his battered head in her lap. "You may call me Jacquie."

He followed her MG north from Centinela Park in Inglewood through the Baldwin Hills and north on La Cienega to Sunset. On The Strip, without warning, she parked and hurriedly crossed through the heavy traffic. Kirk parked in a taxi zone and followed.

She had gone down a few concrete steps to the basement of a two story building. A small elongated-letter neon sign, SMELL THE SALT AIR?, blinked alongside a scarlet door studded with a thousand diamonds. Actually the diamonds were tiny flash-light bulbs. When Kirk pushed open the door, the diamond-like lights went out.

He found himself in the dim lobby of a typical gin mill, catering to everyone who could stand the smoke and racket. A high-tuned Juke box clashed with chatter and laughter of high-tuned patrons. Visibility here was like that of a fog-bound sea, but there was no chance of smelling salt air.

Booths hugged one wall, a long bar hugged the other. All Kirk saw of interest was that in the dim pulsating light and smoke-laden air, everyone looked guilty of something.

He saw no sign of Jacquie Jayne and was about convinced that she hadn't come in here. Then he turned and caught a glimpse of her going through the street door.

SHE WAS pulling away from the curb when he reached his car. He trailed her out Sunset, through Beverly Hills, to Beverly Glen. They twisted up the road squeezed by diminutive, canyon hugging houses.

She swung into a wide car port. He pulled in alongside. "What's the idea?"

"Had to make a quick stop."

"There was a gas station where you parked."

"It wasn't that kind of stop." He followed her up field stone steps to a grape-stake fence. Even in the dark with rain just starting when she unlocked and opened the gate, he saw that this was no diminutive house. She opened a door to a wide and long play room over the car port and flipped a few switches. A blank wall faced the canyon and an acre of plate glass faced the garden. On the opposite

side of the now illuminated swimming pool crouched a long-and-rambling main house.

"Charming," he said.

"Yes. I have this pool house rent-free while the owners are in New York. I always was one for saving a buck." At a door beside a great fireplace centered in a field stone wall opposite the entrance, she paused. "Make mine scotch while I change."

Kirk didn't need to be a private detective to find the bar. Alongside the door they'd entered through it was conspicuous as a nude living art tableaux at The Laguna Art Festival.

Through the door to wherever Jacquie had gone came the sound of a shower. Between the bar and that door, this strangely comfortable room was jam-packed with fun paraphernalia: Everything from a basketball—incongruously centered on the hearth rug—to a pool table, conspicuously centered among everything.

Jacquie was back before scotch covered the ice Kirk had put in two glasses. She was back in a bottom-level shocking-pink terry-cloth robe. He had always preferred blondes with brown eyes. In addition Jacquie Jayne was a richly endowed mantrap and well aware of it.

Her close-cropped hair had been brushed and her face fixed. Kirk handed her a drink and admired what she had done to herself and what nature had done for her.

Soon as she put a match to the fireplace kindling, she switched off all the room lights. Outside the rain played on the lit pool, inside she sat on the hearth rug. She patted the basket ball for him to join her.

He gestured a toast and she drained her glass. "Cozy," she said.

He rolled the basket ball that separated them out of harm's way. It gently came to rest under the edge of the pool table. He offered her a cigaret.

"Not just yet," she said. "Not just that." She handed him her glass for a refill. Again hers was a down-the-hatch gulp. This time she set her empty glass on the hearth and pulled a small blue-green cloisone enamel compact from her robe pocket and sprang it open.

IMMEDIATELY, he saw that this was no ordinary compact—at least it wasn't at the moment. What it held probably explained her stop at the **SMELL THE SALT AIR**. He took the two cigarets from the compact. They were not the kind advertised in singing commercials. "Just for kicks, eh?"

"Sure, after this evening, we need a lift."

He tossed them into the blazing fire. Her blow connecting with his nose gave him a painfully real display of stars and almost rolled him off the hearth rug. He felt like a father to her. He wanted to lift her shocking-pink robe and apply a heavy hand. Instead he stood up. "I just remembered an appointment." He was about to back a hunch and needed help. But because Det. Lt. Travis always laughed at hunches, Kirk decided not to call the police—not just yet. "Be back in half an hour."

"If you leave, don't bother to come back."

Jacquie's angry stare pushed his broad shoulders to the door. As he swung it open, he turned. "No bother." Behind him, his hand set the lock so that he could get back in. Outside, he wedged the grape-stake gate for the same reason. In the now heavy rain, he headed for Sunset Strip with the gathering runoff.

As he pushed through the diamond-studded door at the **SMELL THE SALT AIR?**, the lights went out as before. And Kirk went out before he got in.

Twin bruisers, giant size and uglier, turned him around and pushed. The

concrete steps up to the sidewalk stopped him. Runoff coming down drenched him. When he picked himself up, the door was closed. Its lights sparkled brilliantly in the rain. Kirk tried again. The same thing happened, except this time sound had come to one bruiser: "This is where he went out."

It was a very funny line—the other bruiser thought. But his laugh wasn't laughable. It discouraged Kirk and made someone inquisitive.

"What's goin' on here?" An ordinary-sized cop at the head of the steps towered above Kirk. *Again* he picked himself up.

"Officer," the talking bruiser now spoke like the professor from Pasadena who supplies used-car salesmen with their best *buys*, this man is a trouble maker. Twice we asked him to leave. In trying to oblige, he slipped and fell."

"There'll be no more trouble," the cop said. "We'll take care of him." The face in the prowl car at the curb backed up his partner's words.

And there wasn't any more trouble. Kirk drove away with a tongue lashing in his ears. With him he carried a growing urge to play father with Jacquie Jayne.

He had suspected that the Dick-Tracy-like character she'd described would be at the **SMELL THE SALT AIR?**. In a way, his hunch had paid off. He had stumbled onto something. And Jacquie must have phoned those bruisers about his probable return.

Now he suspected that everything she said was a damn lie. He wondered why she had driven all the way to Centinela Park for marijuana cigarets when—as she proved—she could get them at the **SMELL THE SALT AIR?**.

THUNDER growled and lightning jagged up Beverly Glen. With two exceptions, Kirk found the house as he had left it. A wet trail led from an

open sliding glass door to the hearth rug. There Jacquie sprawled. Naked, face down, and still.

He rushed to her. Her hair was sopping wet. He rolled her to her back. Briefly he noticed that Jacquie was more richly endowed as a mantrap than he had imagined. And now she was utterly unaware of it; she was dead drunk.

He carried her to the bedroom, dried her hair, tucked her in. He returned to the playroom with a pillow and a blanket.

Slowly he fell asleep thinking about a mixed-up model, Jacquie Jayne. She was as phoney as she was blonde. He wondered what her real name was. He wondered many things....

The next morning, Kirk and his client arranged an early appointment at the Beverly Glen State Bank, on Santa Monica in the shadow of the PE overpass at Beverly Glen.

J. T. Ballard, the president and a portly, grey-haired man with heavy embossed half-moons supporting his cold blue eyes, looked guilty enough to have plotted all Jacquie Jayne's trouble. He had been impressively indignant that anyone should question his bank, its methods, or actions. Then he sent for his head teller, Mr. Holden.

Clifton Holden was about Kirk's size and build. No friendliness softened his rugged features. His hair was straight, blue-black, and abundant. His eyes had the color of cold coffee.

A smile creased Ballard's thin lips at sight of the canceled check Holden handed him. "Is this your signature, Miss Jayne?"

Jacquie examined the check briefly. "Yes. Yes, it is."

"We *know*," Ballard touched a card on his desk, "it matches your signature of record."

"But—but as I told you," Jacquie said, excitedly, "I was forced to sign this check last night." Her eyes sprang wide, "How could this check

have been cashed before the bank opened this morning?"

"Miss Jayne," Ballard said with thin patience, "our records and this check show that it was cashed last Tuesday. The Los Angeles Clearing House date stamp is on its back, and it is date perforated 4 19 55."

"But—" Jacquie looked genuinely bewildered, "but I didn't sign a check for \$15,000 until last night. Then I signed it with a gun at my back."

"Whatever you signed last night," Ballard sat down wearily, "hasn't reached us. If it does, I assure you that payment will be refused because of insufficient funds."

TO KIRK everything suggested that his client was dope-tormented and irresponsible. She might have signed a dozen checks when she was high—she wouldn't remember. He said: "Perhaps the teller remembers who presented this check for payment?"

"I remember," Holden said, "as well as I remember Miss Jayne. It was at my window. Miss Jayne herself presented this check for payment." He ignored Jacquie Jayne's open-mouthed stare. "I gave you the money; I saw you put it in an envelope and hand it to the man with you."

"Mr. Holden," Ballard asked, "can you describe the man?"

"Yes. I remember him because such a sum is not usually made payable to cash or drawn on Miss Jayne's account. He was medium tall, about five-ten. Neither thin nor stout. He was—" Holden stared at Kirk "—he looked enough like Mr. Lowe to have been Mr. Lowe."

"Mr. Holden!" Jacquie shouted, "that's a damn lie!"

J. T. Ballard sprang to his executive feet. "That will be all."

Jacquie was as anxious to leave as Ballard was to see her go. And Kirk saw no reason to linger.

In his car, Jacquie told him what

she should have told him before: "Kirk, that head teller—Holden—knew about my depositing \$15,000. He could have had someone meet me last night—it makes sense."

"That might explain how the check got in the bank before it opened this morning—but it doesn't explain the check's clearing house date: 4-19-55."

"But—but—" Her objection plunged into silence. Finally she said, "Take me home. I feel awful. More money than I've ever seen before. More than I'll ever *have* again. Gone! For what?"

At her door in Beverly Glen, Kirk said casually, "I wonder where Holden lives?"

"The Payton Apartments in West—I think. Why?"

"Just curious. Seems like I've seen him some place before."

The yellow directory at the nearest phone booth didn't list a Payton Apartment in Westwood. But it did list a Payton Apartment in West Hollywood—which was probably what Jacquie had been about to say. Why had she changed her mind about telling him?

Was there something between her and Holden? Something neither wanted known?

Kirk found the apartment house, and he found Clifton Holden, 3b on a mail box. And he found more—enough to fill a shoe box.

At 1:40, he entered Jacquie Jayne's borrowed playroom with his borrowed shoe box. He found her as he had last night—sprawled on the hearth rug, face down and naked.

"Nothing worse than a female drunk," Kirk muttered, disgustedly. "Unless it's a male drunk."

He pushed her into the shower, turned full-force and cold. He walked her, stopping only for coffee, hot and black—a little for him, a lot for her. He walked her until she was sober and begged for rest.

"Telephone Holden. Get him here

—let your voice reek with sex—if necessary."

"I don't want him here!" she protested. "I'm afraid of that man."

"Why?"

"Why?" she said warily, "I can't tell you why."

"He stole your dough. You want it back—don't you?"

NOW SHE was interested. "Can you get my money back?"

"I don't know," Kirk admitted. He wasn't even sure that Holden had her dough. He wasn't sure of anything. "All I know is—" He stopped abruptly. He didn't *know* anything. "I got a hunch that some clever boy found a way to clear a check three days before you signed it. The guy was probably a bank teller—probably Holden."

"But I told you, the man last night was taller and thinner than Holden. He had a hooked nose like Dick Tracy. Holden doesn't look like that. He—"

"He lied about you cashing that check yourself—if *you* are telling the truth. I know he lied about my being there. I want to get your dough back. I want my fee."

"Darling," her lush lips pouted, "you're doing this for money—not just for me?"

This gal might be a model, but she was no actress. Kirk knew that she was only trying to make him forget Holden, yet somehow she made him feel mercenary. "You bet I'm doing this for money. After I solve this case and collect my fee, we'll talk about you and what I *don't* do for money. Now, call Holden."

She backed away. "No! I—I can't do that."

"Well, I can." Kirk reached for the phone.

"No. I—I'll call." She went to the bedroom.

When she returned, she said, "He'll be here soon after the bank closes. Promise—"

Kirk knew—he had listened in on the telephone extension. Holden had agreed to come. He had jumped at the chance to come—Jacquie Jayne had a very fetching voice.

"Promise me," she continued, "that you'll not start anything. I don't want trouble. I'd rather lose my \$15,000 than start trouble with the police."

"You what?" This was out of character. Kirk's suspicion skidded, "You got a record? You a fugitive?"

"Of course not!" Jacquie seemed genuinely indignant—maybe the gal was an actress. "My career depends on my keeping in the public's eye as a model, but not in any other way. Advertisers want their models pure and simple, pure and sexy, pure and tantalizing. They want them many ways, but always they want them *pure*—as far as the public knows."

This gal wasn't as dumb as she seemed; maybe she was more than a richly endowed mantrap. He said, "You don't take your career that seriously."

"No. I value my life."

Kirk wasn't sure that there wouldn't be any trouble. He wasn't sure that she'd get any of her 15 Gs back.

"I need a drink. Scotch, darling."

"Coffee, darling," Kirk said. "I'll brew a fresh pot."

She made a face that didn't wear off. After the third cup, she rebelled. "Damn you! No more."

Kirk grinned at her. "All right, no more—for the moment—if you tell me all you should have told me last night."

SHE LOOKED too tired to talk—yet at the same time too tired to resist his demand. Almost without interest, she began, "My need for kicks got me into trouble." Then words poured from her as if the telling would purge her fear. "I got mixed up with the wrong people." She closed her eyes and took a deep breath.

Mixed up with the wrong people! Kirk thought. *They always drag that in to rationalize personal responsibility.*

"Cliff Holden didn't need my \$15,000; he didn't need to—" Jacquie swallowed audibly. "He didn't need to make me think he was crazy about me. It wasn't long before I knew—" sudden anger had taken fear's place, "—that he was crazy. He's money mad and woman crazy—in that order."

Then what she said pushed Kirk to the edge of his chair.

"The FBI should know that Cliff Holden keeps his bank-teller job as a respectable cover and not as a source of income. He's out for big money—and he's getting it. He didn't need my \$15,000," she repeated as if it were a TV commercial.

Then at last Kirk learned why she had called him and not the police.

"He didn't need to get me started on marijuana. But that's the kind he is. Like all the others, he wants a long line of steady customers." As she nervously reached for a cigaret—an ordinary cigaret—Kirk snapped his lighter.

A string of swear words trailed the smoke she exhaled and ended with a humorless laugh. "I was always one to save a buck. Last night Cliff Holden's promise of cheap marijuana enticed me out to Centinela Park. Then he failed to show."

"So he had this guy get your signature on that check." Sure that wasn't the way it was at all, Kirk added, "It figures."

Jacquie's hand trembled as she stubbed out her cigaret.

"No need to be afraid now." Kirk's hand on hers seemed to assure her more than his words.

She got quick control of her lips and her voice and said flatly, "He'll kill me."

"No, I'm phoning the FBI."

Then Jacquie's control vanished.



She clutched Kirk's arm.

"No!"

"Good afternoon."

The voice snapped Jacquie out of her fear. It was as if reinforcements had arrived. Kirk no longer wondered who's side she was on. Somehow Jacquie Jayne had double crossed him.

Holden stood in the doorway in a sports coat no respectable bank teller would be caught caged in. He must have had a key to get in, and he must have overheard their conversation. Adroitly he side stepped so that Jacquie wouldn't be between him and Kirk. There was something odd about his sports coat—something besides its great plaid pattern.

"You want to see me, Lowe?" Holden was affable.

"Yeah, I missed you at your apartment." Kirk threw his shoulders slightly forward to loosen his coat across his chest to facilitate drawing his shoulder holstered .38. "But I did find a few things." He pointed to the shoe box that he had placed on the pool table. "Things you wore last night in Centinela Park. A pair of elevator shoes. The fact that Miss Jayne was wearing low heeled shoes made you seem much taller and thinner than you are. And I found a plastic nose with a false mustache attached—which changed your appearance and disguised your voice."

"A plastic nose and a false mustache!" Holden grinned. "Isn't all that a little corny?"

"Yeah, but it got by in a dark park. And Miss Jayne noticed the suede gloves you're now wearing. She noticed the black stitching on the back of the

left one was frayed. I *now* notice that she was right."

HOLDEN laughed and pointed to the box. "Lowe, you can't prove that those things came from my apartment. You—"

Now Kirk laughed, "Oh yes I can. You won't find anything in that box—those things are still in your apartment. And I have a hunch your fingerprints are on that plastic nose."

Holden's smile didn't fade, but his eyes took on the purplish cast of cold coffee. "I was about to say that you'll not prove anything," he said affably. "You'll not call the FBI. You'll join us—Jacquie and me—and be a man about town with dough in his pockets. You'll make a good pusher."

Kirk had taken too many blows on his head to change sides. Or was it that he had taken so many blows on the head that he wanted to change sides? He looked at the frayed sleeves of his own plain brown sports coat.... To be a man about town with dough in the pockets of good clothes....

He swallowed hard, trying to rid his throat of the solid lump of bad taste. Always before he had been able to ignore bribes in stride. He was getting old. Tired. Weak. This bribe intrigued him. It would be easy. With his reputation for honesty, it would be easy as—

Easy! He'd find easy as Jacquie Jayne had—soon out of self-disgust, he'd be taking the stuff. He could see himself progressively hooked. Mainlining! He could feel the horrible demanding sweat, the uncontrollable shakes—willing to buy relief with any vile act. He could see the end Travis had always predicted for him: "You'll be buried in the filth you deal in."

"You're right, Holden, I'll never call the FBI—not if I don't call now."

Holden shrugged then rubbed his hands together with satisfaction. The act showed Kirk what was odd about

Holden's sports coat. Its sleeves as well as its shoulders were excessively wide. But his sleeves proved more deadly than the shoulders. The hand rubbing process produced a snubbed-nosed .38.

Immediately Kirk regretted that he hadn't been a little more sure of his hunch and risked Travis' laugh.

Holden motioned for Jacquie to join Kirk at the pool table. Motioned for them to turn around. He jammed his rod into Kirk's back and lifted the .38 from his shoulder holster. Then he circled to the other side of the pool table.

"Cliff!" Jacquie said, "what is this?"

"It's the end of your road. The police will find you both dead—shot with Lowe's gun. Murder and suicide in a Beverly Glen love nest. They won't find me." Hatred smoldered in his cold coffee black eyes. "You knew better than to call in a private eye—our organization doesn't like 'em."

KIRK REGRETTED not having called in men trained to handle this. It was too big a job for one unarmed shamus—and too important. All dope peddlers deserve the best—the FBI. He said, "As a private investigator, Holden, I've developed an enlarged curiosity. Before you kill me, explain how you rigged that check?"

"Sure shamus. It was easy as shooting private eyes across a pool table." Holden laughed proudly. "I simply typed out two checks for 15 grand, payable to cash. On one I forged Jacqueline B. Jayne, sent it through the regular channels and pocketed her dough. The unsigned check I gave to a friend who works in the Los Angeles Clearing House. Both checks cleared the same day, the forged one officially, the unsigned one surreptitiously.

"This morning, I replaced the forged check with the check Miss Jayne signed last night. Simple, eh?"

"Yeah," Kirk said. "But what about your clearinghouse friend?"

"He was glad to do it—in return for a little heroin." Deftly with one hand Holden examined Kirk's .38. He pushed his own .38 into his coat pocket. He grinned broadly, "Now I suppose, the ladies first rule still governs."

Kirk's stomach tightened. He could do nothing, except listen to Holden's sneering words and watch his sneering grin spread.

"Jacquie," Holden continued his needling, "you're ready to switch to heroin. In a couple of months you'd be mainlining. Soon your 15 grand would be gone and you'd be a bum. Believe me, it's better to check out while you're still beautiful."

Kirk admired one thing about this rat, Holden. It liked to talk. Its talking gave him time to think. But his thinking suggested only a ghost's way out. Or did it? He thought of the cue bridge hanging under the pool table. He considered dropping to his knees and swinging it at Holden's shins. It was his chance to be a ghost. And he'd be a ghost if he didn't chance it.

With both hands on the table's edge, he leaned back slightly and saw the cue bridge's long handle—And he saw something else.

Without taking his eyes or his aim from either of them, Holden backed to the radio. "Since this meeting must end, let it end on a loud note."

When the radio's blasting commercial all but rocked the room, Holden again faced his victims across the pool table. He leveled Kirk's .38 at Jacquie.

Fear robbed beauty from her face. Perhaps this *kick* was the end she deserved, but Kirk wanted her to live. And he wanted Holden to live. In his plans they both had a future with the FBI.

The something else Kirk had seen was the basketball that he had rolled across the floor last night. He had played a little football and a little pool. What he was about to do in-

volved both. It was a long chance. His only chance.

Holden smiled like a child's photographer. "Watch the birdie," his bland tone moved Kirk, but in a way Holden couldn't see.

HIS TOE found and positioned the basketball on the floor. As if the wall behind Holden were a cushion on the pool table Kirk leaned against, he figured his angles. With no time to waste, he poised himself for a one try kick.

Sound of leather striking leather captured Holden's full attention. The basketball shot by him, whammed the wall, banked back, and unhinged his knees.

Kirk pivoted around the table. He kicked his own .38 from Holden's hand. He pounced as Holden pushed to his feet. He grabbed his wrist as Holden's hand came from his pocket with the other .38. He struggled to straightarm him and prevent his aiming.

Holden jerked Kirk around. Pressed him back over the pool table. Tried to bang his head on its green felted slate. Then Kirk felt a rock-like fist and tasted blood—his own. A sudden explosion blinded him. More blood pounded in his ears and muffled blast. Cordite fumes stuffed his nostrils. But recoil coupled with his efforts flung the .38 across the room.

Sensing its coming, Kirk twisted and avoided the blow all men dread. Holden's knee landed solidly against the pool table's hardwood. An anguished cry escaped him, but he wasn't through.

A jaw-jarring blow dropped Kirk. His world dwindled to one black shoe rushing at his face. He grabbed with both hands, rolled and twisted hard. Something snapped. He clambered to his feet.

Something had snapped, but Holden lunged. Kirk rolled, then quickly rebounded with a right and all his weight. His swing caught Holden's Adam's apple. Staggered him back and sprawled him over the basketball.

Kirk dove at him. A kick caught his side and rocketed a sickening pain through him. He twisted and lunged again. His full weight made Holden wheeze like a deflated basketball.

Again Kirk tried to chin himself to the brink of blackout. He struggled a long time through woozy awareness to painful reality.... He felt someone roll him... then his eyes came into focus on Holden crawling across the floor, his right leg dragging limp from his knee, his right hand stretching for a .38.

Kirk pushed toward him. He grabbed Holden's tie, pulled him up, and drove a right to his chin. He watched him slump like too-wet concrete.

The fight was over. Holden was out cold. And he wasn't alone.

As Kirk had found her last night and again this afternoon, Jacquie was sprawled on the hearth rug. Soon as his hand touched her shoulder, he knew that this time she wasn't drunk.

Kirk lugged the long corded telephone to a comfortable chair. He dialed Ma 5-7911... Homicide... "Travis? Kirk Lowe. I got two for you.... No! Not wholesale—not even discount-house volume. Actually just *one* for you—*young, blonde, and beautiful*. The other one is for the FBI. I'll call them and wait here.... Oh yeah, house in Beverly Glen—10337.... You sweet son of a sorority sister! No, *I* didn't. Her dope-peddling partner shot her. So long, Travis."

Kirk cut the connection and dialed Ma 5-7241, FBI. Then he went to the bar. He couldn't bear to wait empty-handed and think about Jacquie Jayne—the poor kid who did things for *kicks*.

The missing girls all had one thing in common—all could have been pin-up babes, and all were without families or close connections. And another thing—all had turned up dead, electrocuted. So the answer wasn't what the police might first expect—but Ted Archer never dreamed the diabolical answer to the riddle until Dee Fontaine joined the list of the kidnapped lovelies . . .

RUN, BABY, RUN!

by LUCIAN STARK

SOMETHING always happens when you're in a hurry to get away. First Vida Orlando phoned. I told her I was as busy as a dozen moths in Marilyn Monroe's newest fur neckpiece, and that there wasn't any use coming up anyway because both my arms were crippled with arthritis.

Wendell, Homicide Skipper, turned around and laughed.

"Vascular system's out of order," I snapped. "I'm taking pills for it." I reached for my hat and started for the door.

"Hey, you blushing violet!" Wendell yelled. I want you to check those fingerprint reports from Washington."

That guy picks work out of his teeth. "Wendell," I snarled, "there's been ten girls kidnapped and electrocuted—mur-

dered—in the past several months. The newspapers are screaming, and for all you know about it, you might as well be in China. Am I right?"

"You're right," he admitted. "So...?"

"Well, I got a hot lead. Guzzle this; has it ever trickled through your fat head that it takes juice to run a private hot-squat? If a check with the electric company on the juice consumption of private users showed—"

"Say!" Wendell gasped.

As a matter of fact, the juice gag hadn't occurred to me before, and it sounded silly now, but I got away with it, and it was a fine night—for a murder. Chilly enough to get into your bones.

I reached the street and shivered. It had been raining, but the rain had stopped and fog, like long curling dragons, waved over the glistening pavement. It struck me then that something was wrong. Nothing tangible, nothing that could be put into words—but a curiously anxious feeling impossible to shrug off. But Dee Fontaine was probably gnashing her pretty teeth at our usual meeting place, down the street. Not that you'd notice the teeth unless Dee bit you. I don't think that all the gents who stopped and stared when Dee went by were dentists; and I wasn't. No matter what she was wearing, you felt a pang of regret that she hadn't been around when Minsky was still operating. A black sedan, gears meshing, its fog lights two yellow eyes in the heavy mist, rolled swiftly by in the early darkness.

Let's get the records straight. I'm



"Two men kidnapped Miss Fontaine, Mr. Archer..."

Ted Archer, Detective Second Grade. I'm twenty-eight, raw-boned, husky, blond. I've been on the force five years and I should have been a captain half that time ago.

The Orlando babe I mention is anybody's guess. I met her a couple of months ago, and she's been on the make ever since. Not that she couldn't give Dee competition in the tape-measure department, and a throaty-voiced

blonde thrush like Vida didn't have to undulate in my direction out of despair. Maybe she just wanted a legal lug to hold off the wolf-pack. Either way, I wasn't buying or sampling, because I'd seen Dee first.

One hundred pounds of dynamite, that's Dee Fontaine; she's private secretary for one Braxton, an attorney. She'd phoned me at headquarters around five-thirty, said she was going

to get a snack en route and meet me at the corner by six-thirty. Said it was top-priority important and her voice sounded frightened.

Dee doesn't scare easily, so maybe that's what had me worried now. Not the meeting place, but the way she'd talked.

I looked at my wrist watch. The luminous dial said six-thirty-four. I quickened my steps, came abreast of the vacant lot. Dee should have been parked there, by the curb. She wasn't. The side street was silent, empty. I stopped, frowned—and heard a groan from deep within the lot. It came again, low, sobbing, and I dived for the sound.

The fog parted, revealed a car, Dee's car, lights out, doors hanging open, parked in the middle of the lot. My feet hit something soft, and I stumbled, fell whirling, grabbing for my gun. A second later I knew the gun wasn't necessary, but a flashlight was. I found my pencil flash and pressed the button.

Gasp? I damned near fainted. The white light, like an eerie finger, played over a wizened, hunchbacked body. Twisted legs were sprawled out as though clutching in the mud for drive to push them forward. Both hands were curved, raised imploringly. Both eyes were naked, empty sockets!

It was Benny, the news kid, a friend of mind. Benny, lips parted, panting, face oozing blood. More blood stained his jacket front. The jacket was fluttering, and his torso, abdomen to chest, was ripped open!

I cried: "Benny! Benny!" Hopelessly, miserably—and understood at last his upraised hands. Like two unwinking agates, he held in those trembling hands his own eyes!

MAYBE but a few seconds passed. I don't know. It seemed like hours, centuries that I stared, fascinated at that figure beneath me. I could feel my heart, pounding breathlessly; my mind, screaming: "Dee—what of Dee?"

"Is that—you, Ted?" Benny whispered.

I answered him something, Lord knows what. I tell you I was like stone, numbed, transfixed.

"I—I tried to reach the—the sidewalk," that crimson mouth went on. "They'd thought they'd—killed me, but—"

Killed him? It was only will that had stalled off death so long. Minutes only, quite true—I remembered now the black sedan with the fog lights, winding up in second, racing. The only car that had passed. The car without a doubt, fleeing. But there wasn't time for thought now. I said: "Benny, who was it? What happened? Quick!"

"I was—across street—didn't see me. Car stopped by girl parked. Two men jumped—her, made her—drive into lot. I—I thought robbery and sifted closer."

"She didn't scream?"

"Couldn't. Stuff over face. She fought. I—knew kidnapping, and made sound. They—they saw me, got me." A spurt of blood geysered up from his torso. His body shuddered.

"Benny!" I pleaded. "Benny—?"

"Said I wouldn't—see them again." A whisper now, so low I could barely hear it. "Knew I recognized—them."

"You did? Who?"

"Don't know names. Hideaway, at Hideaway."

He died with a last convulsive movement, and I stared at his mangled body, stared and felt fury burning through me.

I LAID HIM on the ground, and got up. Terror came out of the night and clawed at me. Icy claws. I swear I felt them at my throat.

"Dee—?" I whispered. "Dee!" They had her. Why, I didn't know, and then abruptly I did know and I held my breath. Ten girls missing before her, and all of them had one thing in common: all of them could have given cards

in spades to any of the dolls whose flesh spilled out at you in pinup magazines. And there was another thing, though, which didn't apply to Dee—all of the other ten were alone in the city and had no family or close connections. Never a ransom asked, never a clue.

I staggered toward Dee's car, still trying to tell myself she would be here, that she had to be here. It was empty. I played my light over the seat, hoping frantically to find something, anything, which might be a clue. Her purse lay on the floor open, empty; nothing else. But outside the car, half under it on the ground, was a sausage-like cylinder of glass.

A tiny printed label read: *Ethyl Chloride*. That was the reason Dee hadn't screamed. Anesthetic. And then I saw the capillary point hadn't been broken. This vial, at least, hadn't been used.

Perhaps hadn't needed to be used? Had they killed Dee instantly? It was possible, and yet the position of the vial pointed that it had been kicked under the car, bearing out Benny's dying statement that she had struggled, that she must have been taken alive. I shoved the thing in my pocket and backed away, began to run. Not to headquarters, even though it was so near. Wendell would want facts and Wendell could be damnably long winded.

My own machine was parked on the next street. I raced into a drugstore, dived for the phone booth. I called headquarters, and waiting for the connection, remembered what Benny had said. "Hideaway..."

Did it mean they had one, unnamed? That could be. Yet Benny had said, "At Hideaway." And suddenly I remembered the exclusive club outside the city. *The Hideaway*. It didn't make sense. Membership to that club was tantamount to millions, or so I'd heard. Still—Wendell's gruff voice came over the wire.

"Ted Archer," I said.

"Not the Robin Hood of detectives?" Wendell interrupted, chuckling.

"Cut it, Skipper. There's murder on the corner." Swiftly I told him what I had found. I said finally: "You got it, Skipper? You understand?"

Wendell roared: "You get back to that lot and wait!" But I jammed the receiver back on its hook and ran for the street, toward my car. With Dee involved, Wendell and his orders could go to hell.

THE HIDEAWAY CLUB was a half mile off the highway, at the end of a private lane. The building itself was big, four-storied, with a colonial-mansion front. It was painted white and looked like a many-eyed, sheeted monster in the fog. I cut my lights and edged along the parking space. There seemed to be no outside attendants; there seemed, moreover, nothing amiss inside, for weaving past the windows on the lower floor were forms dancing, and I could hear the muted strains of an orchestra. Upstairs, the second floor, lighted too, appeared to be a dining room. Waiters bearing trays passed the wide windows. But the third and fourth floors were quite dark.

I was getting quietly out of my car when a limousine whined up the drive. It stopped at the entrance and a woman got out. She was dressed in flaming red; her hair gleamed, honey-colored. It was Vida Orlando, the dame who had been making a play at me for weeks.

Vida dismissed the car and turned toward the entrance. But she didn't go in; she paused a minute, fumbled in her purse. I could see one bejeweled hand clutching a small card, and suddenly she walked swiftly off the porch, to the side of the building. She rang a bell at a door I hadn't noticed before, flashed the card and entered.

I gnawed my lip and tried to figure the thing out. If the *Hideaway* did

mean something, then amazingly so did Vida's interest in me. To discover what I—the police—had known about the disappearance of those ten girls? It fitted all right, but it still didn't make sense. Because why would Vida, or the *Hideaway*, want ten girls, anyway, if no ransom was involved?

Still crouching uncertainly, I saw three other cars arrive. The occupancy of two of them laughing youngsters, went to the main entrance. The third party, a middle-aged man in evening clothes, hurried toward the same door Vida had used. And he, like Vida, flashed a card in entering.

Two entrances—a phony setup. I knew what I would do. It required ten minutes until the right man came, drew up near my car. A guy, alone, my build. Ted Archer wasn't taking any chances now, so I hit twice with my gun butt, hard. The guy gasped, crumpled, and I shoved him back in his car, climbed in after him.

He had a wallet crammed with bills, and a card. Square red pasteboard. On the face of it, printed with deeper red, was a devil's head, and around the lead, like a little red track, a circle.

I stripped my captive from topcoat to shorts, and got into his clothes, transferring everything from my own pockets to these I'd donned. There was a snub-nosed thirty-two automatic in the glove compartment of my hack—a little matter of precaution I am never without—and among other things, a roll of adhesive tape. I gagged the guy, taped his hands and ankles. And then I went to work on myself.

The small automatic I strapped to my right leg, on the inside just below my knee. I always carry a pocket knife, and this I taped across the small of my back, low down. Five years on the force had taught me that a guy who didn't take precautions was plain nuts. Maybe I should have hiballed back and called the squad—but I had no proof of wrong within the *Hideaway*, and

raiding a place like that without proof would bring new faces into the homicide division within twenty-four hours. Millionaires mean politics—and pull.

So it was Ted Archer on his own, whatever happened, and I didn't care much what happened so long as I found Dee. I shoved my service revolver under my arm, beneath the full dress coat, and started for that strange side door. There was a feeling like I was walking toward the gallows, like the licking fog had hands, warning me, trying to hold me back. The night seemed breathless.

I reached the door, saw a button, pushed it. The door opened and a man said, "Good evening."

He was a blot in the dark hallway, but a misshapen blot, all arms and head and shoulders I flashed the card, and a tiny light in his hand focused a bare instant on it. The card was right. He cut the light, apparently uninterested in my face, murmured silkily. "Shall I take your coat and hat?"

I went on down the hall, tense, right hand near my armpit and the Police Positive; came then to a door, opened it. The room beyond was furnished in quiet grandeur, and a dozen men were at tables, playing bridge!

THEY LOOKED up, ignored me. But a curious something struck my mind suddenly. There had been laughter, music, in the front of this queer building; here, except for the flutter of cards, was utter silence!

In the next room there were more men, all unknown to me, standing around a roulette table. The wheel was turning, ball clicking softly, and for the first time I became aware of the light in their eyes. It was almost a glare, a greedy fascination, when everything pointed to complete uninterest in their game! They weren't watching the wheel!

A liveried attendant touched my arm. "Drinks, sir?" he asked, holding

a tray. I took a glass of amber fluid, held it. He leered at me: "It won't be long now, sir."

Long? What? This infernal politeness was torture. My heart still pounded, pleading for action; my mind still knew frustration, for the next door I tried refused to open. Was I wrong in my guess about the *Hideaway Club*?

I sat down, ditched the drink, and felt sweat running down my side. Dee was in danger; yet I couldn't do anything but wait for proof that she was here.

Suddenly a buzzer sounded. The croupier said: "That's all, gentlemen." The men turned away, toward the door I'd tried.

Their faces expressed naked lust.

They stood by that door, silent until it finally, automatically slid open. They passed through, and I followed them quickly; abruptly tense at what I saw beyond.

The room was easily a hundred by fifty feet, and four stories high. We stood on a narrow, chair-filled balcony that surrounded it. A fine steel mesh rail was around the balcony about three feet high, partitioning it half way at one end. Steps entered the pit from both ends; a steel ladder coursed the right wall, pit floor to ceiling and a visible trap door. But it was the pit itself that astounded me. Covering the floor, fifteen feet below, was a bewildering, gigantic maze!

The thing was a circuitous pattern of six-foot dividing fences, open at the top to the balcony onlookers, its walls a diabolical confusion of full-length mirrors and false, taut velvet-draped chambers. Similar in comparison to the sort of thing you find in practically every resort madhouse.

I began to understand its significance the moment I saw, nearby on the balcony, the wires, the transformer, the bakelite panel front with its array of gleaming brass switches. Sweat trickled down my spine, my body trembled,

as next my eyes fastened upon the blackboard, directly opposite, and its enlightening symbols. Here was a miniature system of racetrack betting!

Even as the trap opened in the floor at the very center of the maze and the head and shoulders of the first girl emerged, I knew that I was witness to the devil's own race course, upon which human beings ran, goaded by depraved, sadistic throngs above them. Men who paid terrific prices for the devil-headed admission card, whose bets were made against the house with percentages favoring the house. Whose winner spelled murder.

A hooded man came to take his place beside the panel switches. The man could be only executioner. Death ran Satan's racetrack, Death doubtless to the loser to spur the runners frantically onward. It explained the ten missing girls, the electrocuted bodies we had found far removed from this place. It explained, in part, the whereabouts of Dee Fontaine.

I should have watched the balcony, but there were five girls huddled now below. Young girls, buxom, enticing, nude, faces white masks of terror, eyes like frightened, blazing jewels. I couldn't take my eyes from them, and unconsciously, my hand stole toward the service gun, clutched its butt when the scream came. Not from below—from beyond the meshed partition.

I whirled, an instant later drew the gun. Vida Orlando, a tall masked man beside her, was pointing at me. "It's Ted Archer-copper!"

I had the gun out all right, trigger finger ready to fire, but I wasn't fast enough. A guy leaped on me from one side. I fired, and knew I'd missed. Simultaneously something hard cracked my head from behind. I heard jeering laughter, and then nothing.

A low humming drilled upon my brain first. Pain came drumming after it. I was sitting, leaning against the balcony wall, my feet tightly bound. So,

too, were my hands behind me. The maze was visible through the mesh railing.

Aglow with snaking red neon, twisting, winding maddening in those countless mirrors, the floor was a scarlet, writhing murder—pit, hell itself. Blue flame sparkled from it, and the bodies of the five moving girls glistened weirdly. They were racing through the wild maze, trying to find the way to the finish.

The spectacle fascinated me, and for a long minute I stared, unable to pull my eyes away. The girls began to scream, and a greedy roar went up from the watching crowd. Someone cried: "Number four is going to win!" And I saw then the branded figures on each white back—burned into their flesh. I saw their bodies crashing helplessly at the countless false leads. I saw that they were stumbling frantically toward the course's end.

A bell began to ring and there was movement near me. The hooded executioner was pulling a switch. Below, a ball of brilliant blue appeared, glowed wickedly, spitting, leaping, following like jagged lightning the planted wire-leads in the floor. It zigzagged as though a thing alive, and the dry burnt odor of electricity suddenly suffused the room.

The trailing girl sent up one cry of soul-searing terror as that glowing ball struck her naked heels. She became a mass of twitching flame, a living pyre. The stench of roasting flesh, a thin wisp of smoke, floated upward.

I closed my eyes almost unconscious to the yells around me. A droning voice called the winner, a brief interval to the next race. Next race? Then there would be more, another ghastly murder! Another-it hit me like cold, icy water.

Dee would run that race course!



MY BRAIN whirled. I turned and saw Vida Orlando and the masked man eyeing me. They were close to the mesh grating that separated them from the balance of the balcony. The blonde singer looked more undressed than the girls below, and her face glowed with a light that made me shudder. She couldn't have nestled closer to the masked man, and neither of them seemed to care if anyone saw them. Vida said: "But we don't know how he came here, or how many others know and may be here too."

The man chuckled. "With no interruptions? Rest easy, Vida." His voice was like a file, a voice that oddly startled me.

"You're not going on?"

"We've taken these men's money, haven't we?" he snapped. "We've got to produce. Moreover, Archer barging in may mean we might have to close up permanently." He caught my eye, laughed softly. "Do you want to bet on Miss Fontaine, Archer?"

I swore at him, and he laughed again. He said: "A passing thought, Archer.

You're not going to fry. It's much too easy for a dick. Remember the hunchback? Something like that, something that hurts."

I didn't answer, couldn't answer. The identity of the masked man, the "head" of this fiendish layout, taunted me in its elusiveness. I knew that voice, but I couldn't place it. Knew too, suddenly, that death for Dee-and me-was not only near, but seemingly inevitable. For all eyes had turned back toward the pit. The trap was opening once more, and the first head through it was Dee's!

I believe I lost my mind in that moment. I know I tried to tear my bonds in frenzy. They cut my wrists, and frustration bred increasing terror in my heart. I lay back panting, completely ignored, and saw three other girls emerge, quaking, panic-stricken. I began to pray, babbling words even I did not understand.

And suddenly I felt pressure near my knee, something turmoil hadn't let me realize before. They'd hit me, tied me; they'd taken my Police Positive. But they hadn't found the automatic strapped to my leg!

Faint hope, combined with desperation, cleared my mind. The gun-and the knife I'd plastered to my back.

A MAN appeared below with a charcoal brazier, a second man followed him from the trap. They caught the nearest girl—I bit my lips, tasted blood. I heard that girl scream. When I opened my eyes, she was cowering, sobbing, and a small red 3 had been burned upon her back!

My brain fought on for reason, stood stark still when Dee's turn came. Her scream...her flesh branded. My frantic fingers had found the knife, opened it. My hands were free.

A warning bell sounded and all eyes again were on the racetrack. The hooded man jammed home a switch. Snaking neon, cries, greedy eyes-all

the madness re-enacted as the race with death once more began. My hands were like streaking light, slashing at the ankle ropes, up then for the automatic. Once grasping it, strength welled within me.

Caution now? Caution at this time would spell death! I shot squarely for that hood. A neat round hole appeared at ear level. The man fell, I gained the bakelite board and pulled the switch, before anyone realized what had happened. Beneath me Dee's voice cried: "Ted!"

There were at least four more attendants scattered over the balcony, plus the "Head" and Vida. Two of the former, nearby, leaped for me. I shot twice more, and strangely I was never calmer in my life. However small the caliber of my automatic, those men dropped!

The Head roared, "Back! Get guns!" I vaulted the rail, dropped fifteen feet into the maze. The Head's cry pounded through me. They, momentarily at least were without weapons.

From within the maze, its diabolical ramifications were blinding, unknown. But I'd seen it from above. I hit the floor, knowing exactly where Dee crouched. The knife ripped velvet drapes until I reached her side.

"The switch!" rang a frenzied order.

I caught Dee up, whirled as light leaped around me. The first mild voltage tore through my tingling body, and I remembered that blazing blue ball. Knew it was even now on its mad way to overtake us.

One breathless leap carried me to the maze's outer edge-barely in time. Behind, three girls I could not aid screamed shrilly, instantly aflame. One leap...and one quick look. The Head had his back turned, was jerking a fire-ax from the wall. The one stairway up, on his side, was still free. The other way, the other stairs...men were pounding down the steps, armed men, their guns spitting lead.

Something clicked abruptly in my mind. Fire-ax... a floor charged with electricity... and I still carried the vial of ethyl chloride I'd found at Dee's abandoned car. Ethyl chloride, an anesthetic-but inflammable, too, and explosive!

The knife went crosswise to my mouth; left hand, free, found the vial. I threw it, dropped with Dee to the floor as a roar shook the walls. Sheeted flame darted up from the velvet drapes, flame that eagerly caught dry, aged wood. The men coming toward us were cut off. But Dee, I saw then with despair, had fainted.

Somehow I got her to my shoulders, staggered for the other stairs, gun ready. Halfway up I saw the Head, Vida behind him screaming. The Head's lips were drawn back in a hideous grin. He was swinging the fire-ax, ready to throw it.

I shot, a snap aim, knew the bullet was too low. But it caught his leg, turned him before he could cast his weapon. I shot again, missed him completely, Vida's bosom showed a spot of red. She disappeared from view, and for the third time I pulled that trigger.

The gun jammed. I threw it, but the Head, on hands and knees, was crawling towards us, laughing! The mask had slipped from his contorted face. The Head was Braxton, Dee's employer.

WITH DEE unconscious, no gun; only the knife between my teeth left me; it was suicide to try to pass him, gain the door off the balcony, try then to get through to the outside and freedom. I'd known that all along, mentally provided for it. Even with the balcony was the steel ladder leading to the roof. I lurched for it, began climbing, gained a half dozen rungs as Braxton reached it also. Braxton still had his ax.

"You can't make it, Archer," he grated. "The roof trap doesn't open easily. You and the girl must die. Only you two are left who know me. Archer, you know I'll reach you, don't you?"

I knew it, dully, agonizingly. I knew I had to use one arm to hold Dee; the other to hold myself. I could kick at him as he drew closer, but he could remain out of reach of my feet and he could still swing his ax. He could sever my feet, drop us both into the inferno already two stories down.

The areaway, now, to the very roof, was painted red. Smoke came in waves, a blinding, choking fog. And between its hot gusts, inescapable as eternity, indomitable as the wind, was the livid face of Braxton, pressing ever closer. I felt Dee's body stir, heard her moan, and through teeth gritted on the knife, my own voice cut into the crackling flames.

"Dee—Dee, you've got to listen!" She said weakly: "Ted."

"Don't talk—listen! Can you hold on to my neck? Have you the strength?"

She must have looked below, for she gasped, and her body stiffened.

"Dee, help me!" I cried, and felt her arms around my neck. They tightened!

I reached up for the roof trap door, the hasp—rusted. The door wouldn't open.

Braxton's voice screamed: "You're cornered, Archer! I've got you!"

There was nothing to do but dare to release Dee, dare the test of her failing strength. It was that or death for us both. She gasped again, hung on, and my one hand, thus freed, caught at the knife between my teeth. I threw it, and we were so close to Braxton's upturned face I couldn't miss. The ax brushed my trousers, fell away as a red blob appeared where Braxton's eyes had been before.

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Laura Fay had put the finger on Dave Shand for a rub-out, unwittingly, she claimed. So Rube Morelli figured she could do the same for him . . .



SNOW TRAP

by JULIUS ELMAN

THE CEMETERY was bleak and deserted when Detective Rube Morelli arrived at Dave Shand's grave. Workmen had already piled the wreaths and flowers high around the fresh mound of earth, and had departed. A fall wind kicking around dry leaves heaped against nearby tombstones was the only thing to break the tight stillness.

At first, Morelli had been going to come with the others, the precinct captain, the detectives, the boys who had worked with Dave when he had pound-

ed a beat; and then, because he knew there would be tears in his eyes, because he might break down right here in front of them, he had waited.

For he, Rube Morelli, was known as a tough dick. Years in the service had put a touch of gray in his thick black hair, bared now as he stood silently staring at the heaped-up flowers, and his face was gray around a square jaw that was as grim and cold as the gravestones themselves. He had always been a cop who smiled a little; who had never taken a bribe; who hated killers with all the fury packed into his solid, six-foot figure.

They always said he had no nerves. He had been known to face a gunman's fire, his own body wounded, and shoot it out practically face to face. And when the man had gone down, dying, Rube had been known to say, "Let's find another."

He had done these things and thus the force had come to say of him; "He's square, and a fighter—and hard."

But he could cry like any other man.

And so Morelli had waited, until everyone had left the cemetery; and now here he was alone, staring through mist-filled gray eyes at the last resting place of a youngster he had loved. Head uncovered, thin lips trembling as he spoke, he said softly now, "To my dying day, Dave, I'll trail him. I'll get the man who got you if it's the last thing I ever do. I'll—"

He stopped, a sob in his throat. Shand had been the kid rookie Rube Morelli had helped over the ropes, from a youngster pounding the sticks of Brooklyn up to the detective division and the Broadway Squad. And now he was dead.

Wind rustled the white roses in a huge piece in the center of the grave. Morelli's tribute, it was, and written on a sash stretched across the middle was the one word: "*Buddy.*"

The memory of a smiling, happy-go-lucky face in his mind, Rube turned and started half blindly down one of the paths to the roadway. At first he didn't see the girl, and then, because he was naturally a curious man—one who was observant of slightest details—he became aware that she was going up another path toward the very spot he had just left. She carried flowers.

He stopped, turned, and waited. Apparently she had not seen him.

She stood, even as Morelli had stood, staring silently at the grave. She was blonde and slender and tall in a two-piece sports suit. Then she was stooping down, placing her flowers

atop the other wreaths, and she remained in that position. After a moment the shifting wind carried to his ears the soft sound of her crying. He walked back up the path.

And because she was an attractive girl, he stared at her when she stood up, looking slightly startled at his sudden appearance. She had blue eyes, and a small curved mouth, and she said, "Oh, I didn't see you!"

He asked, "You knew him?"

She was dabbing at her eyes with a tiny lace handkerchief. "Yes," she nodded.

"Very well?" Morelli knew that he had never seen her before.

"No," she said.

But she was sizing him up closely. Her eyes flicked from his feet to his dark head, taking in the gray tweed suit and topcoat over his arm. She seemed to be seeking some sign of something. Then she said: "I had just met him. He was the grandest guy I ever met."

"He sure was," Morelli agreed.

She looked at him more closely then. He was going to tell her that he had known most of Dave's friends, and had never seen her, but something about her manner—it was as though she were being cautious—stopped him. And so he said: "I was a friend of his. I wish you'd tell me about it."

"About what?"

"Meeting him, and all that." His eyes had been studying her closely and there was something he was certain of now. She, too, had come here alone for a definite reason. She looked as though there were something on her mind, and she had to tell somebody about it. But was afraid. So she had come here late, alone.

"It wasn't much," she said. "Where I work. I'm a singer. He came there a week ago, and we got talking and he was—well, just swell, that's all."

RUBE MORELLI'S blood was suddenly pounding through his chest.

He put in quickly, "A singer? Where you work? Then it must be the *Top Hat Club*. He was—"

The blonde girl's face had suddenly blanched. "What do you know about—"

"He was killed outside the *Top Hat Club*!" Morelli stated.

For a full moment the girl stood stiffly, one gloved hand pushed hard against her red lips. But her eyes never left his.

She studied him again, from head to foot, and then she said: "I should have known, of course. And now I've got to tell it. I've been waiting too long. I was with him three minutes before he was killed. I even heard the shots and came running outside, and there he was, alone, on the sidewalk, bleeding—" Then: "And you're a detective, his partner perhaps."

Morelli nodded. "Why didn't you tell us before?"

"I couldn't. I was—afraid." But now that she had finally found someone to talk to, she raced on rapidly. "I knew so little about Dave. He came there, and he seemed to like me. Then, this last night, he wanted me to get off early. I fixed it all right with Henry, and Dave waited outside and after a moment started out. Then there was the shots—and—" She sighed, drew in her breath slowly and finished: "There would have been questions, and I wouldn't have been able to tell you policemen a thing, I had the job to think about—"

As though he had known her a long time, Morelli took the girl's arm and started leading the way down the path. She had known his Dave, and through her, now, it seemed suddenly that Shand was near him. He said: "I'm Rube Morelli, homicide detective. I don't believe you mentioned your name?"

"Laura," she replied. "Laura Fay." Does it really make any difference?"

"Yes, Laura," he said. "It makes a

whole lot of difference. For you're going to help me find the killer."

IN A CAB, riding back to the city from Woodlawn, he told her about it. Dave Shand had first visited the *Top Hat Club* for good reason, for it was there that he had hoped to pick up the trail to the Head. That's all he was known as—yet—the Head. But the man had been flaunting the law for a year now. Dope, women, unions, were some of his rackets. And it was said that he operated from the *Top Hat Club*.

Three months ago a detective with a hot lead had been rubbed out. And then Dave, grinning in his usual manner, had stated that he was on the right track. But he had insisted on swinging it alone, until he was certain. And now they had removed him, too.

Staring thoughtfully out the cab window, his gray face bleak as the fall day, Morelli said: "You have no idea how he might have been spotted there, do you?"

"How do you mean?" she asked. She wasn't afraid of him now, or rather, of the law. She had said she wanted to help, and the tears in her blue eyes told Rube just how much she had cared, about Dave.

He explained: "Someone in that club is close to the big boy. Unwittingly, you led them to him. Don't ask me how. Did Dave ever tell you he was a dick?"

"Only on that last night," she said. "And he advised me not to mention it to a soul. I didn't. I don't see how—"

"That's why I'm going to take his place," Morelli went on. "Starting tonight. What time do you come on? I mean sing?"

She suddenly looked worried again. "At midnight and two o'clock. But—"

"And you're certain you have no idea who ordered Dave's death?"

She shook her blonde head. "Of course not—"

"Then try to find out who orders mine!" he said abruptly.

"I don't understand!"

Morelli explained briefly, "This time, tell them I'm the law. A guy you met some place. And that I'm nosing around apparently looking for information. Tell them that, and that I've been pestering you to death. I'll handle the rest."

She gasped, "But you! They might kill you, too!"

He said quietly, "It's the least I can do—for Dave."

She lived in a neatly furnished room in a walk-up near Lexington and 53d. Laura took him upstairs, where they talked over several further details.

This girl might be a plant, even though she seemed to be straight, living along. But for a kid sincere in getting on with her singing, Laura Fay had picked the most questionable night club in town. And a babe who could put on the ingenuous act, make as if she didn't know the score, or what the display she made meant, was often a better drawing card than the usual dish.

Either way, she was just what Morelli needed.

AT MIDNIGHT, the *Top Hat Club* was going full blast. It was a place of silver and black and red. The "cats" in the swing bank were hot; glassy-eyed women in low-cut gowns, were talking loud, and the cigaret smoke burned your eyes.

Rube Morelli, trim and square-looking in a dress suit, drifted casually into the cocktail lounge. The touch of gray at his temples, the fresh shave, made him look like someone of importance. Morelli was just thirty-five.

She was there, as she had said she would be. She sang here in this big room, strolling around among the crowded tables. She was singing now, and Morelli could see that if she

wasn't playing it straight, Laura Fay was one damned good actress—good enough to sucker Dave Shand, who hadn't been exactly naive. Her gown managed to be enticing and tasteful at the same time. He could see the effect she had on the other customers...

He walked up to the bar. There were a dozen bartenders, all busy, but one smaller man seemed to be over the others. A small neat sign on his white coat said: "Henry."

To him, Morelli said: "Scotch and soda." Then, as he dropped a half-dollar piece on the bar, "When Miss Fay finishes her song, tell her I'll be over there at that corner table."

"You know her?" Henry asked. He was a thin man, sharp-eyed, and he had not the jovial smile of most bartenders.

Morelli replied coolly, "What do you think?" and walked to the table, carrying the drink with him.

A few minutes later, she came over and took a seat at his table.

"They already have you spotted, Mr. Morelli. I heard one of the waiters telling—"

"Finel" he put in. "It's working faster than I expected. Which one?"

Without moving her head or indicating anyone in particular, she said, "The waiter who is coming over to your table right now." She said this as she leaned forward to accept the light which Morelli held for her cigaret. He saw the frightened expression in the back of her eyes. Part of the act?

To the waiter he said: "Another Scotch and soda. You have something, Laura?"

She shook her blonde head, and as the waiter departed Morelli studied the man's thick shoulders and one slightly mashed ear. He smiled, "He used to work for Nick Garambone. A bad one."

When the waiter came back with

the drink, Morelli's big hand gripped the man's arm just as he was turning away, and he said quietly, "Tell the Head there's a fella out here wants to see him."

The girl looked puzzled, and the waiter said gruffly: "Come again, mister. I don't get you."

"The hell you don't. Tell him there's a cop here wants to see him."

The big waiter's face remained impassive. "Maybe you better speak to Henry, brother. You don't talk sense."

"Then send Henry over," Morelli rapped.

When the waiter had left, the girl whispered worriedly, "Mr. Morelli! You shouldn't! You—"

He said, "Call me Rube; make it personal-like. Remember what I told you, about wanting to think we know each other real well?"

She asked: "But how—"

His eyes on the bar, Morelli explained, "Something I learned this afternoon." He saw the waiter talking to the small thin man named Henry behind the crowded bar.

After Morelli had left the girl at her room that afternoon an inspector at headquarters had told him about it. Dave had been on the right track; the big boss behind the latest wave of crime and dope and missing girls was the owner of this *Top Hat Club*. Who he was, nobody knew. But as Morelli's superior had stated: "We do know this, however: He's referred to as the Head. But, Rube, you better be careful—"

And Rube had growled, "The damned rat. What do you think I am? He got Dave, didn't he? I'll get him if I never figure another case!"

To the girl, quickly now because he saw the one called Henry starting from behind the bar, he said, "Tell whoever's in charge out here that you want off early. Date with me, see? I'm going to stick my chin out now, and if they think I'm wise to

something, they're going to try things when I leave. Tell them you're going to meet me outside, but don't come out. If they try what they did to Dave, they'll go after me in the same way."

"Oh, please!" the blonde girl cried softly.

"Now do that," Morelli finished.

She got up and left the table just as the one called Henry came up. Laura smiled back intimately at Rube.

The thin, sharp-eyed Henry stopped very near Morelli's elbow, made a pretense at cleaning off the table. In a low voice, he grated: "Okay, dick, what's the gag?"

Morelli grinned. It was working faster than he had figured it would. They probably even knew his name. He said:

"It's real personal, fella, and important. I got a little message for No. 1—"

"Who the hell is No.—"

"Tell him," continued Morelli, "that it's a message from Dave Shand. He'll know!"

As he talked, Morelli had removed a small mashed chunk of lead from his coat pocket. He held it in his big hand now, so that Henry could see it, and he murmured softly, "Here's something the Head gave to Shand, Henry. That's what I want to talk to him about!"

The man said, "Wait," and walked off.

A moment later Morelli saw him talking to the girl. She was probably asking him to get off early, to go out with himself. And in so doing, Morelli knew that he was getting them more worried. Henry would relay the news—probably through the waiters—to the big boy in a hurry. He knew their reactions. Just what did this nosy dick know? Did he have something on the boss?

They would find out—and soon.

And he had not overlooked the fact that the Head might be sitting right here in this room with him now, watching him, waiting. . . .

The girl came back first. Laura said: "Oh, Rube, I don't see how this is going to get you any place at all, and I'm worried." This was no act now; her blue eyes told him how frightened she was. "I can't stop thinking the way Dave walked out of here; that you're a snooping detective looking for trouble and he doesn't want to have any trouble—"

"What time?" asked Morelli.

"He said I could leave at one. But—"

"I'll wait for you outside the entrance," said he.

It was just ten minutes to one now. The girl, eyes clouded, left to go to her dressing room.

Henry, the thin one, came back and said, "All right, bloodhound, I've fixed it. At exactly five minutes to one you be outside, a half block down the street to the left. There'll be a sedan waiting—the one with the new-style turtleback. We're going to take a ride out and see him."

Morelli smiled, calmly lit a cigaret and said, "Swell."

Henry left. He didn't go back behind the bar, but disappeared through a doorway leading to an office in the rear of the place.

FIVE MINUTES to one. That meant they would get away from the place before the girl came out. This had been arranged so she would see nothing, be unable to state a thing—later! Rube Morelli was glad about that, though. If there was going to be any shooting, he didn't want her nearby.

Outside it had snowed a little, and it was cold. It had stooped snowing but the street was white with it. It gave him a chill, though, for it made him think of one lying out there in the cold ground. The flowers would

be wilting now, and soon there would be just the hardening ground, and the snow, and—

Morelli spotted the sedan. In fact, he had seen it out here for a week now. Every night. Snow had frosted over most of the windshield, but the twin wipers had cleared two spots that were like staring black eyes in some sleek-looking black monster. Dimly, he could see someone at the wheel.

Hands in his pockets, Morelli walked slowly past. His gun was in that side pocket and his fingers caressed the reassuring feel of cold steel. Yet he doubted if they would try anything here, yet. They didn't know what he knew, and it was quite logical that they would first find out.

The side windows of the car were covered with snow. He couldn't see the driver—or anyone else who might be inside.

As he reached the tail end of the sedan, Morelli made a sudden movement. Even the rear small window built into the sloping turtle back was frost-covered.

Then he was on the sidewalk again, walking back again. And just in time!

The front window on the curb side had lowered now, and a voice said, "Okay, copper, here's your taxi." He had noted when behind the car that the motor was purring softly.

But it was the rear door that swung open.

Stiffly, hand still in his pocket, Morelli put his foot on the running board. From inside the car, a voice said, "All right, fella, toss your rod in first. No one carrying a rod gets to see the Head."

Morelli shrugged and handed over his .38. He had to play it their way now. He had asked for it, and maybe he would get it. But, by damn, he was going to see who the Head was, if it was—

There were two heavy-set men seated in the rear seat of the sedan. One

was the poker-faced waiter with the mashed ear. Rube Morelli was indicated to a place between the two men. He was quickly frisked for further arms. They overlooked the small deringer tucked beneath his belt, at his back. Few persons ever thought of looking in such a place for a concealed gun.

The driver turned then and Morelli saw that it was hard-eyed Henry, of the bar. Henry said: "If you planned to tip off the flatfoot on the beat to follow us, you're all wet, dick. We had a guy drag him off on a phony call."

Morelli said, "You boys think of everything."

"Yeah," thin-faced Henry went on. "And those apartments across the street are owned by the boss. So we know you haven't got any pals planted there watching."

The car hadn't moved, though the motor was still running. Through the cleared spots on the front windshield, made by the wipers, Morelli could see that the street was deserted at this hour of the night. He asked: "Well, what are we waiting for?"

"You'll see!"

Even before the girl appeared, he realized what they were waiting for. And when she did come out of the club, a man quickly approached her side and started walking this way with her.

The man with her shoved her into the car. There were two jump seats in the sedan, and one of these was set up now and the poker-faced thug moved onto it, indicating a place beside Morelli for the girl. There was a gun in the hand of the one on the jump seat; also a gun held by the other one sitting beside Morelli.

The man who had brought the girl got in the front with Henry. He remarked, "Real cozy-like, eh shamus?"

To the girl, Morelli said, "I'm sorry they dragged you into this."

"I asked for it," she murmured. "And—"

"Shut up!" Henry, the driver, said, and the car started rolling.

He knew then that it hadn't been an act. There was no need for Laura to carry it along any further, now that he'd been nabbed. Even if they had decided to eliminate her along with him, if she'd been one of them, they wouldn't show their hand yet. They'd let her think she was going to watch a copper get the business, and enjoy her taunting him until she found out she was in the same boat.

WITH THE frosted windows, it was hard to look out and see just where they were going, especially when they finally left downtown area and reached the suburbs. Of course he could watch through the small, cleared spaces on the front windows, but they turned corners fast, finally followed a dark road that was unfamiliar.

But it was the girl's presence that really had Morelli upset. His hand had touched her own and felt its trembling, though she had not uttered a protest. He kept his hands over hers after that, in the slim hope that it might help her a little.

But a girl—

Rube Morelli, the toughest dick in the department, had done reckless things before. Taking this chance with death was just a small thing to do to avenge Dave's murder. He knew, had known, he was walking into a killers' nest, but in his battling, crazy career he had done such things before. And always his quick-thinking, trained mind had figured a way out. But now—

There was one slim chance for the girl. But this depended on eyes that would have to be sharp, on— The car had stopped.

Morelli and the girl were ordered out. It was a rather large house, and he judged the section to be Riverdale, where houses were widely separated.

This one had vacant lots on either side.

They were prodded along inside, down a flight of stairs, along a musty hallway and into a large room that was located at the rear of the house. The room had no windows, was below ground level.

Morelli had purposely walked slowly, forcing the men to urge him along. He was stalling—

Inside the room, they were circled by Poker-face, the other pale-eyed thug who had ridden on the back seat with Morelli and the man who had brought the girl. This latter was tall, thin, with a hook nose and eyes that were like cold green buttons. The chauffeur, Henry, had not come in yet.

Poker-face ordered, "Sit down!"

Seated, watching the guns covering them, Morelli finally asked: "Well, where's the Head?"

One of the men smiled.

Henry, the driver, came in then. He took up a position near the door, lit a cigaret and planted one heel up against the wall behind him. He started flipping a coin in his hand, and Morelli saw that it was a half-dollar piece. Then, with a start—he saw he had overlooked the whole set-up until this very moment, and now he saw how nicely things were worked at the *Top Hat Club*—Morelli knew who Henry was!

The thin-faced man, still tossing the coin, grinned at Morelli and said, "You get it, don't you copper?"

Laura gasped: "What does he mean, Rube?"

Morelli said tauntly: "He—Henry's—the Head."

The girl's face went white.

Poker-face, tugging at his mashed ear, grinned, "Yeah, meet the boss, copper."

But Henry said, the smile gone from his face now and his voice very hard, "All right, dick, talk! What do you know?"

It was then that Rube Morelli started talking. He was not a talkative

man, ordinarily, and he had a time making it convincing. But if they had seen, as he had told them to—

But it was Henry who finally said, "And now I'll take that slug, Morelli?" He motioned to the coat pocket where he had dropped the smashed piece of lead. The lead that had killed Dave Shand.

Slowly, still stalling, he got out the lead and held it in his hand. Henry said, "You thought maybe you would get my gun, is that it, shamus? You could then fire a slug from it and then prove that it was the rod killed Shand. Well—"

He grinned nastily, "Stand up!" he rapped. Then, to the girl, "You, too!" Morelli felt a terrible tightness in his chest. He said quickly, "Wait! Not her! She doesn't know a thing!"

"The hell she don't!" blurted Henry. "Or if she doesn't, she soon will!"

The single ceiling light revealed four menacing faces that were strangely taut now. Henry said, "Against that wall, Morelli. You and the girl. You'll go out together, real chummy-like!"

HE HAD thought she would scream, or start crying, or make some sort of awful scene; but she didn't. Beside him, she reached out for his hand, and said, "We lost, Rube. We tried to help Dave and lost—"

"Shut up!" rapped thin-faced Henry. His black eyes were deadly, but he seemed to be listening. Morelli heard it then—the mournful wail of prowler-car sirens!

Two of Henry's henchmen started toward the doorway, crying out, "It's a trap! This lousy dick—"

For a scant moment, their attention had been diverted. And it was then that Rube Morelli made the furious movement toward his belt band. It was a trick thing that he had practised many times, and he didn't fumble now. Smashing the girl to the floor with his left hand, he got his gun

scooped out the back of his coat with the other.

He shot out the one ceiling light. In Laura's ears, he whispered beneath the smashing uproar, "Stay down!"

It was hell while it lasted. Guns started flaming, until Henry screamed, "Watch it, you fools! We'll be shooting each other." Morelli's advantage was that he could shoot anywhere toward the door, which was still clear in his mind, and not make any mistakes. He heard two men go down sobbing.

Then there were the pounding feet, and the commotion of many men coming down the stairs and the sounds of more guns blasting. Half beneath Morelli, against his ear, the girl cried, "Goodby, Rube Morelli, you're the bravest man I've ever—"

But it wasn't goodby. When it was all over, there were the cops—a dozen of them—and two wounded gunmen on the floor, one dying. Henry, the Head, had a slug through his right wrist and was cursing nastily now. But the cops, some of them, were smiling grimly. One said: "It worked, Rube."

Henry, clutching his shattered right wrist, snarled: "What worked, copper?"

The prowling cop said, "The sign on the back of the car."

The girl, trembling and clutching to Morelli's arm, asked, "What does he mean, Rube?"

Before answering, he walked over to Henry, took out the mashed slug from his pocket and shoved it before the killer's face. He said, "All I wanted was your gun, Henry, and now we've got it. We knew this slug came from a gun of foreign make, and if we could find it, we'd have Dave's murderer. So now we have it."

The gun which one copper held was of the type Morelli had been

seeking. He handed the officer the slug and said, "Take them out, Reilly. Turn these in at headquarters."

Later, when everyone was gone and a prowling car was waiting outside to take Morelli and the girl, he said to her: "It was snowing a while tonight. The snow crusted on the turtleback of that car and I marked on it, 'Rube Morelli and the Head.' Before coming to the club tonight, I had the commissioner pass out word to watch for that clue—to have every cop in New York watch for it. I didn't know—then—just how I was going to give it, but they were to watch for the two names linked together. And every copper in town knows who we mean when we say the Head."

"Yes, but—" the girl started to say.

"Somewhere along the route we passed a prowling car. And there, standing out in their headlights, was that message. It was a gamble, and we won."

Laura breathed softly, "Yes—we. You and Dave and I."

Walking slowly out of the house, her warm arm tucked beneath his own, Rube Morelli said, "I don't feel so bad about the snow on his grave now. For that same snow saved our lies. Maybe it's the way he wanted it."

The girl's blue eyes looked into Rube's own, and there was something else beside thankfulness there now. She said softly, "You know, when I first met you I imagined you as hard. I don't think that I could believe that now—after tonight—and what you did for Dave, and me."

And Morelli, thinking of the future—when maybe he had known her for a long time—thought that she was the kind of woman who would make the right kind of a wife for a cop.



ANNALS OF CRIME

WHERE IS DR. CRIPPEN?

BY A. A. HOEHLING

ONE MISTY morning in 1910, destiny had a date on a bleak stretch of the St. Lawrence River with one of the world's most celebrated killers. And destiny had an ally, one that it never made use of before—the wireless.

Chief Inspector Walter Dew, of Scotland Yard, stood near the wooden shacks of the pilot station at Father Point, 185 miles northeast of Quebec. He was straining his eyes for the first glimpse of a passenger liner, the *Montrose*, as were others beside him, including 50 newspaper reporters and photographers.

Three weeks ago, the world's press asked an insistent, almost hysterical question, "*Where is Dr. Crippen?*"

But now, at last, most everyone

knew. The wireless had told them, even though it had not taken Dr. Crippen himself into its confidence. And for the inspector, this was to be the dramatic culmination of a long career in criminology. He was planning to retire, and those were the thoughts which occupied his mind one afternoon in late June.

Mr. and Mrs. Nash, a middle-aged couple called on him. Mrs. Nash, further identifying herself as "Lil" Hawthorne of the stage, was disturbed at the report of the death of a fellow member of the Music Hall Artists Guild, where she was known as Belle Elmore. Her actual married name was Mrs. Hawley Harvey Crippen, or simply Cora Crippen.

Mr. and Mrs. Nash, in the United

States for the past year, had returned to London only two days ago. Picking up the threads of their English acquaintanceship, they had first taken a horse cab to 39 Hilldrop Crescent, the residence of the Crippens. It was a large, semi-detached brick house, fringed with shade trees, in a quiet, middle-class section of London.

They found no one home except an attractive young lady in her twenties. She suggested they take a tram down Holborn way to the Albion Building and talk to Dr. Crippen in his dentistry offices. Now, concerned, they followed her advice—and within the hour had learned the sad news from her husband's lips. Cora Crippen had died in California.

"Lil" Hawthorne was not satisfied; and neither was Inspector Dew. He retraced the route followed by Mr. and Mrs. Nash, hurrying out first to 39 Hilldrop Crescent. There he, too, was greeted by the young lady—who identified herself to the police officer as Ethel Le Neve, 27, Dr. Crippen's secretary. A quick inspection of the downstairs convinced the inspector of one thing: the very respectability of 39 Hilldrop Crescent was certainly sufficient to throw even Scotland Yard off its guard.

The lithograph of Queen Victoria over the mantel, matched by Canterbury Cathedral on the wall opposite; the overstuffed chairs, with the lace head rests all neatly in position; the immaculately-swept, deep carpeting—even the slow, sonorous tick-tock of a grandfather's clock in the far corner, and the smell of a half a century of teatimes all blended into an atmosphere of about the same relative menace as that of a country church.

MISS LE NEVE reluctantly directed Inspector Dew to the Albion Building, where he found Dr. Crippen pedalling with his feet the all-too-familiar tooth-drilling machine, as an elderly patient clutched the arms of the old

wood and leather chair. The dentist himself, the inspector found of extraordinary appearance: incredibly short, probably 5-foot-3, thin hair, but a bushy, huge sandy mustache, and dull green eyes which continually squinted though thick-lensed glasses.

During a leisurely luncheon, and subsequent interrogation which stretched throughout the entire afternoon, Inspector Dew learned a great deal about this mild-mannered little man, who seemed in no way reluctant to talk. He was "almost likeable," extremely clever but, as the inspector guessed early in their conversation, "an accomplished liar."

Hawley Harvey Crippen said he had been born in the tiny manufacturing town of Coldwater, Michigan, 48 years past, the son of a dry goods merchant. He attended the University of Michigan and then took his MD, he said, at a place in Cleveland he called Hospital College. He first practiced as an eye and ear specialist in Salt Lake City, where he married and was subsequently widowed, in 1890.

He returned East, this time to Brooklyn, where he became associated with a Dr. Jeffery. Shortly, he fell in love with one of Dr. Jeffery's patients, whom he knew as Cora Turner. And Dr. Crippen entered into matrimony for the second time. Later, she admitted to her husband that she was a Russian-Pole, and her real name, Kunigunde Mackamotzki.

Inspector Dew obtained the impression that the very unpronounceability of her name, and the fact that she had withheld it from him, had become an early source of annoyance to the doctor. Her attempts at acting, and her physical overshadowing of her tiny husband, also appeared to have fed an incipient anathema of her mate's.

In 1900, Dr. Crippen moved to London, to sell patent medicines and to practice dentistry. If he had any illusions that he had seen the last of Cora's ample girth, he was mistaken. In a few

months she followed him across the Atlantic. But Belle Elmore was no more successful in her music hall sketches (vaudeville) than she had been as Cora Crippen in a wifely role.

Her debut at Marylebone Music Hall was also her finale. She lavished Dr. Crippen's money on acting and singing lessons; but the only thing that flourished, seemingly, was her weight and her husband's irritation.

Inspector Dew became increasingly aware that Crippen's "very frankness" could be misleading. The little man's climax, in this respect, was his "confessing" to the inspector that Cora Crippen was not dead. She had left him and returned to America; he had inserted the death notice in a theatrical paper, and printed mourning cards, to avoid any professionally-damaging scandal.

On July 8, a Friday, Inspector Dew left for 39 Hilldrop Crescent again. As the briskly-trotting horse pulled the light cab over the cobblestones, past familiar London landmarks like gloomy, grimy Kings Cross Station, and brooding old St. Pancras Church, Inspector Dew was himself brooding in contemplation. He couldn't quite put his finger on it; but he knew something was wrong.

THIS TIME, he visited the coal cellar, although for no particular reason that was clear to Inspector Dew. While Dr. Crippen, his hand in his pocket, and Ethel Le Neve at his side, stood silently at the top of the stairs, the inspector walked slowly over the bricked floor, poked at the coal piles absently. He found it as neat as basements go.

Before he left, the Scotland Yard chief requested the little dentist not to leave the city, even though there was still no evidence that Dr. Crippen was any more than an accomplished liar.

Yet the very next day, Saturday, Inspector Dew was forced to alter his thinking radically, as he paid another

call at 39 Hilldrop Crescent. Dr. Crippen and Miss Le Neve had vanished; now the inspector was certain that the dentist was much more than a liar.

Again his footsteps led to the coal cellar—though he remained unable to explain its magnetic attraction. With the tip of his shoes he tested one brick, then another. Finally, he discovered a brick which was slightly loose, then another; he lifted them out.

The gruesome evidence was before him: human flesh.

Chemists were quickly brought into the case. Their task was the more difficult since there was no head, or limbs, or even parts of these bodily members. But the laboratory report was amazingly definitive considering the meagre evidence; the remains were of a woman, who had been poisoned by the narcotic hyoscin, fatal in doses exceeding even $\frac{1}{4}$ of a grain. Cora Crippen had last been seen January 17, and pathologists confirmed that she could well have been dead that long.

Next, someone in a nearby doctor's office in the Albion Building reported that Dr. Crippen had been seen purchasing boy's clothing. Slowly, the parts of the puzzle were being fitted together.

"Wanted" posters rolled from Scotland Yard's presses, with pictures and descriptions of the short little dentist with the luxuriant moustache and his 27-year-old girl friend. Dr. Crippen was wanted for "murder and mutilation"; Miss Le Neve as an accessory.

Reports filtered in from all over the British Isles, from across the English Channel and into Continental Europe. Crippen and Ethel Le Neve were "seen" together the same day in such widely-separated places as Dublin and Paris, Glasgow and Zurich. Spreading with the speed of light all over the world, the news was absolutely spell-binding to America, where it took a firm grip on front pages, and held onto it.

Dr. Crippen, the quiet, obscure little dentist from Coldwater, Michigan, had become the most famous uxoricide of all time.

The "break" came from an unexpected quarter. Scotland Yard received a message from Liverpool, relayed from the steamship *Montrose*, bound for Quebec. Captain Henry Kendall had hit upon the completely novel idea of using the brand new Marconi wireless—installed for use in emergencies—to report the presence on board of two people he was certain were Dr. Crippen and Ethel Le Neve. They had come aboard in Antwerp; and although she was dressed as a boy, and his moustache was shaved off and he wore no glasses, Captain Kendall had no doubt the two were the same as specified in the circular he had received before sailing.

Inspector Dew cabled Quebec, but he wanted to be in on the arrest himself. Dr. Crippen had proven himself to be no ordinary criminal and somehow—just somehow—he might give authorities the slip at the last minute, and vanish forever in the Canadian wilds.

Time was running out. If the Chief Inspector caught the fast *Laurentic* tomorrow, Saturday, July 23, from Liverpool he might beat the *Montrose* to Quebec by a few hours.

INSPECTOR DEW went to sea. He tried several times in Mid-Atlantic to communicate with the *Montrose*, but it was no use. Although the more powerful shore stations could "work" the ships at sea and anyone could recognize the strident "COD" (first "S.O.S.") distress calls, the wireless was not a dependable instrument then for chit-chat between ships.

Scotland Yard's emissary was debarked at the pilot station on Father Point Saturday night, a fast 8 days out of Liverpool; there he was met by detectives from the City of Quebec. He sat up the night talking with them, as the milling mob of reporters plotted

ways for a beat on the story, and the Father Point light winked above them in solemn aloofness, off-on, off-on.

Shortly after dawn the *Montrose* blew throatily on her horn and poked her prow out of the mist. She slowed down, just offshore, to await the pilot boat. This time, in addition to its normal complement, the boat carried a most singular pilot. Worthy of the best Sherlock Holmes tradition, Inspector Dew had disguised himself in regulation pilot's uniform.

Deep down, the inspector had a feeling all along that Dr. Crippen would jump overboard—if he had not done so already—and swim for it. It seemed to him that the shrewd little dentist must have "sensed" what was about to happen.

On board the *Montrose* Inspector Dew greeted Captain Kendall, and immediately saw that his hunch was, happily, false. Crippen, shaven of his moustache, had appeared from behind a funnel and was walking down the boat deck toward him.

"Good morning, Dr. Crippen," Inspector Dew greeted the other man casually.

Crippen stopped and for a moment said nothing. But the "twitching of his Adam's apple" was enough to convince the inspector that the fugitive knew it was all over.

"Good morning, Mr. Dew," he finally replied.

"You will be arrested for the murder and mutilation of your wife Cora Crippen, in London on or about February 1," Inspector Dew continued.

Miss Le Neve was found in their cabin, still dressed as a boy. Later, on the 14-hour voyage to Quebec, Captain Kendall explained what had attracted his notice: the incongruous sight of a man and a 'teen age boy almost constantly holding hands; the shadow of a moustache that kept trying to grow back, and the mark on the bridge of Crippen's nose, where eyeglasses normally belonged. The steward, too, had

reported that no boy had every kept his things so neat in a cabin as had this one.

Altogether he could not believe them to be "*John Robinson and Master Robinson*," as booked on the passenger list. The captain saw nothing out of the ordinary in his deductions, but most reporters disagreed; they thought that he, too, belonged in Scotland Yard.

Crippen and Ethel Le Neve made no statement during their week's wait in Quebec. There, public curiosity and indignation both grew, and the two had to be heavily guarded. Inspector Dew was more than relieved when he hustled them on the *Laurentic* for its homeward journey.

IN A FEW weeks, the trial commenced at Old Bailey. Dr. Crippen steadfastly maintained his innocence. He had no idea how his wife's mortal remains—if indeed they were hers—got in the cellar. But the jurors formed a much clearer idea: they decided that Dr. Crippen should be hanged "by the neck until dead."

Ethel Le Neve was found not guilty; that pleased everybody, too.

Late on the night of November, 22, in cold, gray stone Pentonville Prison, Hawley Harvey Crippen pinned a note to Ethel Le Neve: "*Time is short now, and there is so much that I would say...what agony I must go through at the last when you disappear forever from my eyes.*"

The world, he lamented, would never understand a love such as his and Ethel's.

While London slept early the next morning, the trap sprang with a crack that reverberated throughout dark, dreary Pentonville Prison. The British courts considered closed "the most intriguing murder mystery of the century," as Inspector Dew labelled it.

But the echoes did not fade into complete silence. The gallows did not quite end the story of the mild-mannered little doctor from Coldwater, Michigan, who had overlooked the potential of the wireless in his calculations.

The Provincial folk around the lighthouse and the pilot station at lonely Father Point always said that Dr. Crippen, so close to freedom, had placed a silent curse on the ships, the people, and the very land bordering their St. Lawrence tidewaters.

Four years later, the *Empress Of Ireland* collided with a freighter off Father Point, and sank with a loss of 1024 lives. It remains to this day the greatest disaster to befall an ocean liner in North American waters.

The skipper of the *Empress Of Ireland* was Captain George Kendall, formerly of the *Montrose*.

In 1950, important Rimouski, home to 15,000 inhabitants, just inland from Father Point, half burned to the ground in a fire fanned by unheard-of-hurricane-force winds sweeping in over the St. Lawrence.

The name Hawley Harvey Crippen is not entirely forgotten in these parts.



HOT MIX

by BASIL WELLS



Somehow, he knew that the missing girls would be found — but he hadn't counted on finding them himself!

YOU STUFF a handful of yellow or red peppers and some onions and cherry peppers and carrots and cauliflower into a glass jar that comes to you on the conveyer. You're real careful how you place the peppers and the other ingredients before you fill and seal the jar—hot mix is a showy job if an expert packs it right. And it'll tear your head off when you try eating it like lettuce, or maybe pickles.

I stood there for a minute watching the girls sitting around the conveyer before I upended the barrel I'd just rolled down from the loading platform. The barrel's hollow bottom gave a mist thwack of sound and the girls turned their heads.

Jim Shoup, over in the corner fishing pickles out of a big wooden tank with a long handled net, didn't turn around; but I knew he was watching. It was his job to see that the girls were kept supplied with plenty of work. He was middle-aged and big shouldered, but he felt that his flat-nosed broad face was handsome. You could see it in the wolfish grin he flashed only at

the more attractive packers and sorters. And they smiled back; men were scarce.

"Hi, Ralphy!" That was Vivian—short plump and friendly. "How's about a date tonight?" She simpered. "I'll buy the beer."

Shoup's dark eyes were narrow behind his glasses; for the moment his net was not moving. Vivian was one of his special favorites; I had learned that in the three days since I had drifted into Maharville.

"Make it next week," I told her, and as I turned back to my work I smiled at the slim dark girl beside Vivian. Her eye closed a fraction of an inch. I was taking *her* home after work.

Essie, the perky little redhead with the sandpaper glued on her tongue rasped out a laugh. "Wait until you eat your lunch," she said loudly. "You got another girl, Ralph. One that bakes pies."

The rest of the table laughed. I knew who they meant all right. Bea Lubin, the big cow-faced woman at the end of the conveyer. She dropped her frizzy blonde mop of hair lower so I

didn't see her wide blue eyes. Up until tonight, Jim Shoup had been receiving the generous half-pies that the big woman baked.

Shoup would like me more than ever after this! Yeah!

I tipped one of the empty pepper barrels and started rolling it out of the room toward the barrel shop. Brine sloshed inside against the sectioned head, and the metal rim ground into the dank cement. My right hand revolved inside the upper rim, propelling it along.

Up a ramp I rolled the barrel. A door was open and the spicy heady odor of sweet liquor and brine was diluted with warm night air. I caught a glimpse of stars over the row upon row of looming round wooden tanks filled with brine, pickles and sauerkraut. From below the wide-planked bridge outside the door came the sounds of steam pushing and complaining on its way from the boilerhouse to the long building where kraut was being canned.

I left the barrel jammed up against a few hundred others, all of them painted their distinctive red, yellow or green colors, and reached the clock two minutes late. All the others had rung out. I punched my card and went up into the shipping room for my lunch.

"FUNNY THING the way Milly pulled out," the truck driver was saying. He gulped down another piece of Bea Lubin's excellent pie that I had split with him. "Two weeks back it was. Cute kid, too; only she was playing around with that ape." His head nodded toward Shoup who had just come into the long low warehouse and was leaning against the door frame.

"Didn't report off or anything?" I asked.

"Rang out for lunch," the man said thickly, and his Adam's apple mastered the cherries and pie dough. "Didn't go home, and no letters since."

This was getting somewhere at last. She was Pete Gordon's sister, and he'd heard about her disappearance the day before I left the army for good. We'd both been in the hospital at Fort Devens, where I'd proven painfully allergic to the sulfas and had been discharged, and Pete has asked me to do what I could; with his left leg broken, he couldn't do anything.

So that's how I just *happened* to drift into Maharville and hit *Mahar Pickles* for a job. Pete was a good guy; and now I was thinking that maybe Jim Shoup could tip me off as to Milly's whereabouts.

"Probably she'll be phoning from Cleveland or Konyot City one of these days," I said rolling up the paper bag that the landlady packed my lunch in. Bags were scarce, she told me.

I got to my feet and walked toward the door where Shoup was lounging. We had a few minutes before time to ring in again, and I could ask him a few questions about Milly. But Shoup beat me to it.

"Glad you took Bea off my hands," he grinned sourly. "Hope she don't pester you like she did me. Always wanting me to come out to her place. Crazy for a husband, that wall-eyed cow is!"

I felt my stomach swelling a bit like it always does when I lose my temper. My throat felt full; I forgot all about Milly.

"She may be a cow," I managed at last, "but there's no white stripes down her back like a skunk's got."

Shoup's fists doubled up and his heavy shoulders hunched forward. "Meaning—what?" he demanded angrily.

A door slammed in the distant end of the long packing room, where sorters were finding their places at the tables and bins. The round pale bulk of Vance, the swing shift foreman, came with nervous swiftness through the wet-hosed alley between wheeled

flats and stacked cardboard cartons. Shoup backed away grumbling something about seeing me later, there was nothing friendly in the way he said it, either.

"Craig!" Vance called. That was for me. "Craig! You're to stay here when the loads of kraut come in from Michigan. I need you to move those empty barrels out from under the bridge."

He went by in a swift rolling cloud of flabby pale flesh into the shipping room. He turned at the door. "I'll speak to your foreman," he shot back. "You can get to work right now."

"I'll need a light," I said, "where..."

"Shoup can show you," Vance said impatiently and was gone.

I didn't care to bother Shoup, and so it was fifteen minutes later that I found an extension cord and carried it past the hot mix table toward the plank bridge to the huge outdoor tanks.

"No date for you tonight, Ralph," snapped Essie, her tiny green eyes snapping and her red hair flaming. "Vivian left at lunch time." Her bony red fingers darted deftly as she spoke.

She laughed the nasty little rasping laugh that had hurt my ears the first time I heard it. Vivian's place was empty. And then I remembered, with a hallow sense of something being wrong, that Milly had left work the same way. Of course there was nothing—Vivian was probably draping her friendly, fat little body over the town's only bar by now.

I snorted something; there were no words to what I said, and went out under the planks of the bridge.

TWO HOURS later I found her—Vivian, I mean. I'd moved most of the rusty-hooped barrels back to the coopers' shop, where they'd be rebuilt, freshly paraffined, and painted, and was cleaning out the last rows stacked close up to the big wooden tanks. She was there.

I'd moved a barrel and it seemed heavy—as though its bulging belly yet contained brine or peppers—and I upended it in the semidarkness of the cave formed by the planks overhead. The head was gone but I saw something inside. I reached down, gingerly; it might be rotted kraut or a putrid mush of pickles or relish, and I felt the silky strands of human hair.

I lit a match. Vivian was curled up in the damp salt-crusted interior, her face blackened and her eyes... I shook out the light, but not before I had seen the marks huge fingers had made on her soft full throat. I swallowed hard, my mouth tasted sour and dry.

Someone, at lunchtime, had strangled her and stuffed her body into the barrel. And they'd be back, after work, they'd come and take her body away to bury it.

I put the barrels back as they had been. When I finished, I was dripping with sweat and my hands were shaking. If Vivian's body were discovered now I knew who would be railroaded to the chair. I was a stranger in town; Vivian had been making a nuisance of herself. And since lunchtime, I'd been alone out in the yard working with the barrels. Maybe she'd been waiting for me there.

Sure, I knew that I hadn't killed her, but that wouldn't clear me. I had to trap the killer—and I needed a witness!

I coiled up the extension cord and went back into the plant. The women were lined up at the clock waiting for eleven o'clock. Even as I slipped the looped rubber strands over the wooden peg that had held it I heard the faint musical ding of cards contacting the clock's mechanism.

The slim dark-haired girl came toward me, smiling.

"Sorry, Jenny," I mumbled. "Can't walk home with you, after all; Vance wants me in the office."

Her eyes flashed black and bright

and she snapped her back straighter. I could see she thought I was trying to get out of our date. My shoulders shrugged. If I landed the murderer, she would know why I had stood her up. Otherwise—well, she'd probably be glad that I hadn't taken her home.

I went into the office and faced Vance across his untidy desk. "Want to show you something," I said.

Vance started to splutter something about quitting time and seeing about it tomorrow. That made me hot all over, I jerked him out of his chair and marched him out the door. He was bigger than I was, but he was soft. The factory was empty and our feet sent hollow echoes through the dimly lighted rooms.

"You're—fired, Craig!" squeaked Vance.

"That's okay with me," I told him, "but I'm showing you who murdered a girl here tonight before I leave."

Vance's puffy white face turned yellow. He went limp under my fingers. "Mur—murder!" he gulped out. "In the plant?"

"And we're catching the killer," I said firmly, tightening my grip. "Just you and me, Vance."

"No—no!" protested the pot-bellied head foreman nervously. "Call up Herb Ripple. He's constable. He'll guard the body. Call up the sheriff."

"Nup," I told him shortly, "that'd be sticking out my neck. Now just shut up. Another peep and I'll gag you."

Vance went along meekly. I found us an empty wooden tank with a broad wooden ladder inside it and we went down inside. The night watchman was just coming out of the boilerhouse and I felt Vance's muscles tightening. I clapped my hand over his mouth.

"No you don't!" I hissed, and after the watchman passed I gagged him with his own handkerchief and used his belt to lash his hands behind him.

"Sorry," I whispered softly, "but I need you."

"Glug," said the squirming man.

I climbed the ladder until my head was level with its rim. From here I was looking down at the plank bridge linking the tanks and the buildings together. The killer would be coming soon I hoped.

A FREIGHT went grinding past. It had been three hours now that I'd been watching. My legs were cramped and aching and my lips were cracked when I dabbed my tongue at them. Before too long, the morning shift would be coming into the plant.

Maybe the killer wasn't coming back. Or maybe—I gulped hard on the thought—Vance was the murderer! He'd told me to move the barrels, he could have killed the girl and then planted her so it would seem that I was responsible.

In the back of my mind, though, I felt that the disappearance of Milly Gordon and the death of Vivian were linked together somehow,

I tensed. There was a rattle of sound, something brushing against a rough wooden surface. Then I saw a huge dark shape prowl cautiously forward into the shadows under the planks.

I freed Vance's hands and cautioned him to make no noise. We climbed the ladder and waited breathlessly at the tank's battered wooden rim. After a moment the shape emerged and this time it was misshapen—Vivian's body flung over a thick shoulder.

Vance's breath sucked in violently, and I knew he had seen. I slipped off the gag, now that Vance had seen I wouldn't be headed for the hot seat.

"I'll trail him," I whispered in Vance's ear. "You phone for help, tell 'em there's a killer on the loose. Bring guns."

I went down into the faint starlight and rounded the corner of the

building the burdened man had passed shortly before. Past the water tank I went and caught a glimpse of the battered felt hat of the man I trailed against the dark sky.

Across the meadows beyond the factory I followed, more by hearing than by sight, until the dark rectangular loom of buildings was just ahead. Here there was a faint glow from a shielded lantern inside a box and a shallow hole before it with a shovel and pickaxe on the loose dirt.

That's why Shoup had been so late! He'd dug the grave first. And if I wasn't too wrong there'd be another grave close by with Milly Gordon's body in it.

Maybe, I told myself, I'd better hide here until daylight and let the law take over. Shoup was a huge gorilla of a man, and now he'd be fighting for his life. I'm husky, sure, but not so crazy about fighting I go around asking for trouble... So I started crawling back away from the sound of shovel clicking on the stones in the dirt swiftly covering Vivian's crumpled form.

There was a woodpile. I found out about it when the loose chunks came raining down upon me when I hit it. The killer came alive, this time with a flashlight full in my eyes. I heaved a chunk of wood and a splinter ripped my thumb open as I let go. The light blinded me. Shoup's heavy body

hurled me backward and I lashed out with my fists. His body was strangely soft and resilient to my blows.

Then those fingers that had wrung the life from Vivian's body clamped into my own windpipe. And I heard the dull hopeless tones of the killer as I struggled for air.

"Sorry to kill you, Ralph." The words came from a great distance. "She wouldn't promise; I slapped her and she fell down. I shook her. She was dead. I was sorry."

The fingers tightened, but with my last glimmering of knowledge I realized that I had been wrong. It wasn't Jim Shoup I'd been trailing. It was Bea Lubin, jealous of Shoup, and now of me, who'd killed the two girls. That had been Milly she was speaking of—or perhaps her simple mind confused the two girls.

"Shouldn't have followed me," she said faintly, a thousand feet away. And then: "no—no!" I heard a hollow thunk.

The fingers suddenly loosened and I was gulping in the night air. I heard another dull blow and then I heard Vance's panic-shrill voice. He had followed me after all!

"You all right, Craig?" he demanded, and I grunted assent.

When Nate Stone saw Madge Barton, he figured that maybe Josh Decker was right. Madge looked like a real neat dish — just the kind who would marry an old man and help him into a comfortable grave.

don't miss

THE SHOTGUN SLAY

by William F. Schwartz

it leads off the current issue of

SMASHING

DETECTIVE STORIES

All readers of **CRACK DETECTIVE** and **MYSTERY STORIES** are invited to participate in this department. If you disagree with Dr. Fell, by all means write in and tell us; if you want to comment and discuss further some subject he treats with, your letter is also welcome. And if you have any questions about crime or criminology that can be answered in our pages, Dr. Fell will be glad to oblige.



THE ARMCHAIR CRIMINOLOGIST

by LEWIS FELL, Ph. D.

THE RECENT hearings in the House of Commons, and its subsequent vote in favor of a Bill abolishing capital punishment in the United Kingdom, brings up questions which have long plagued the honest meditations of lawmaker, jurist, and layman alike. Is capital punishment defensible, morally? Does the supreme penalty serve the ends of human justice? Should the circumstances under which capital punishment is meted out be more rigidly restricted, if the penalty is to be main-

tained? Does it act as a deterrent to crime?

Throughout Christendom, the death penalty for serious crimes has been regarded for centuries as the ordinance of God, as revealed in the Laws of Moses, in the Old Testament. The rule of "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth", clearly indicated that willful murder should be atoned by the death of the killer, at the hands of duly accredited servants of the civil authority.

Two centuries ago, twenty years before the birth of our nation, the

British law was widely regarded as the most humane in the world. To our minds (from the viewpoints and ideals of 1956) it seems savagely repressive and vindictive; some two hundred crimes bore the death penalty, and a child could be hanged for stealing a pocket handkerchief. But even then, amelioration was in process: British jurists were becoming increasingly inclined to sentence convicts to transportation, rather than the gallows—particularly for crimes which we would today consider trifling. America, the West Indies, and Australia (particularly the latter) were dumping grounds for convicts.

Numerous countries—Sweden, Finland, Portugal, Mexico, and 15 Swiss cantons, the name a few—have abolished capital punishment. Here in the United States, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and North Dakota do not employ the death penalty. Rhode Island allows capital punishment in one instance only: when a prisoner serving a life sentence for murder kills a guard. To date, no one has fulfilled the requirement, and the Rhode Island gallows seems to be a museum piece.

Restriction of the death penalty seems to be an issue on which proponents of capital punishment can agree, in principle. Even the Laws of Israel did not require that every man who killed another must necessarily be put to death. Cities of refuge were provided for those who killed accidentally, or without intent; the slayer could live there in peace, and there was no extradition.

The question of moral defensibility will probably remain controversial so long as executions by the civil authority, or memories of the practice, remain with us. There is weight on both sides. Proponents of capital punishment maintain that a person who has killed once, and gotten away with it, cannot be trusted not to try his luck

again. Capital punishment, they say, is a necessary defense of the State—and property—against those who think they can outwit the police and criminal investigation forces, or bamboozle juries if caught. Opponents contend that the majority of “murderers” in state prisons are people who have never been indicted for any crime previously, and who are plainly victims of circumstances beyond their control. They say that the death penalty is an act of vengeance, not an attempt to balance accounts by forcing (or permitting) the culprit to atone for his crime.

HOW DOES capital punishment serve the ends of human justice? The word “human” is all-important in this question, because we are not dealing with empty abstractions, but an attempt, on the part of fallible men and women, to deal fairly with one who has failed to abide by the laws. But juries and witnesses remain fallible. In theory, the accused is assumed innocent; he is not required to prove his innocence—the state must prove him guilty. Juries are instructed to give the accused the benefit of any reasonable doubt. A judge may dismiss a case wherein the prosecution has failed to present sufficient evidence. A convicted killer may obtain a new trial if new evidence is found, or a higher court is satisfied that the trial which resulted in his conviction was in any way irregular.

Unfortunately, the above describes an ideal; in actual practice, the accused is often convicted by the press before his trial. The only persons satisfactory to the contending attorneys are often incompetent to perform their job. Attorneys are notoriously more interested in winning their case than finding the truth of the matter. And innocent persons have been convicted of capital crimes—not by that unjustly maligned “circumstantial evidence”

(which, in actual record, has acquitted more persons than it convicted) but by the false testimony of lying or incompetent witnesses.

Opponents of capital punishment point out that a guilty man often has the means (money, connections, and plenty of brass) to wrangle an acquittal, where the wrongly-indicted sometimes has none. And while the state is required to furnish an attorney for the defense of a prisoner who has no means to secure his own legal assistance, such counsel can rarely stand up against a prosecutor who sees an opportunity to advance himself by means of a brilliant conviction.

The death penalty, it is averred, serves no goal of human justice. It offers sadistic satisfaction to the bereaved, but no restitution; and, of course, killing one man has never resuscitated another.

The two positions can be summed up rather well in a pair of quotations. Opposed: "The punishment of criminals should be of use; when a man is hanged he is good for nothing." (Voltaire). In favor: "We do not aim to correct the man we hang; we correct and warn others by him." (Montaigne).

But in the last analysis, it is the question of whether capital punishment has acted as a deterrent to crime which is fundamental.

AMONG THOSE who say that it does not deter, are Lewis E. Lawes, Former Warden of Sing Sing Prison. Ex-Warden Lawes states, in answer to the question: "Statistics, for one thing, show that it does not. Many of the states that do not inflict the death penalty have much lower murder rates than those that do. (The murder rate did not decrease when Kansas reinstated the death penalty.)

"Other statistics show that few murderers are even arrested. How can it be said then that capital punishment is a threat to the potential murderer?"

"Perfect crimes" therefore do exist; the most common, of course, is the one that no one ever hears of or suspects. The others are those still listed on police records as "unsolved."

Let us consider first degree murder as the one crime for which the death penalty might justifiably be maintained. In deliberately taking the life of another human being, without circumstances which apply to officers of the law performing their duty, members of the armed forces doing likewise, or private citizens inflicting mortal wounds upon an assailant, in self defense—the culprit has forfeited his own right to life. God may judge him more mercifully than men, who cannot see his heart, or know the measure of his repentance—but society demands that he be exiled from this world.

Has this attitude of executing the convicted murderer—without malice, and only after as fair a trial as human fallibility could offer at the time, in allowing due time between sentence and execution for the discovery of error and the culprit's repentance—deterred potential murderers?

There is one kind of murderer who has never been so deterred, and that is the person who is a criminal by occupation and who kills upon being so commissioned, or when necessary to escape detection. To this person, the death penalty is an occupational hazard, a calculated risk.

But, on the other hand, there are criminals by occupation who make it an ironclad rule never to carry a gun, or other weapon. Thus they avoid the temptation of shooting themselves out of trouble; and the penalty for any crime is more severe if the accused was armed at the time.

But criminals make up a small minority of the populace; statistics show that the majority of persons convicted of murder are first offenders. Once the offense has been committed, they are in danger of execution. And since the death penalty is the most extreme

that the law can provide, then it no longer matters whether the culprit has slain one or one thousand—the penalty is still the same. Thus, whoever has murdered once, cannot be deterred from repeating the offense by the threat of capital punishment.

There are, unfortunately, no statistics on the number of persons who did *not* follow the impulse to murder because they took thought of the consequences. We have no way of knowing whether such persons outnumber those whose thought of the penalty merely led them to take greater pains in concealing evidence which might convict them. No., again, have we statistics on the number of murders committed in desperation when the culprit, faced with immediate capture or exposure, slew to protect the life he knew to be forfeit.

It might be asked how many lives have been needlessly sacrificed in order that capital punishment might be

inflicted. For while some who murdered have repented thereafter, or, while feeling that their crime was justified, would not kill an officer of the law, it can be safely assumed that most murderers will not surrender peacefully if they think there's a chance of escape. And some may prefer being shot than hanged, electrocuted, or gassed.

If you travelled around the United Kingdom two or three hundred years ago, you might come across gibbets at crossroads; and if you did not see the remains of malefactors thereon, there'd be a good chance of nosing them out otherwise. To the educated man of the time, this was a good sight to see, or otherwise become aware of; it told him that the King's Justice was being done in the land, and that the rights of honest citizens were being protected.

Today, we can't be so sure.



Run, Baby, Run!

One dazed, groping hand clutched at air. The writhing face swayed, fell. Flames seemed to rise up for his hurtling body, eager to clutch him.

Seconds later I had the trap door open, clambered with Dee upon the roof, and our lungs gulped the cold clean air.

I wrapped her in my coat, held her shivering body close. She began to sob. "Dee, the woman, came to Braxton's office unexpectedly while they were talking about tonight. I overheard... things that worried me, something about the *Hideaway Club* and missing girls. So I phoned you. But Braxton was suspicious, not sure how much I'd overheard, and coming to meet you I realized I was followed. It didn't seem possible anything could happen to me so close to Police Headquarters. Besides, I didn't yet realize they were ac-

tually murderers, so I parked, and then—"

"It's over now, darling," I said gently.

"But it isn't! We're still trapped. They'll shoot us—listen!"

Screams and shots came from below. I said: "It is over. You see Ted Archer always plays for keeps. We couldn't raid the club without proof, but I told Wendell to put a cordon around the place, and if I wasn't out by midnight to tear it apart.

"Honey, does a guy like me rate a kiss?"

Not that I usually ask, but—I did.

"And a new answer to my perpetual proposals?"

"No!" Dee said. "That is," she smiled, then, "I mean maybe."





Raymond wondered whether the Hamilton woman's reaction came from horror or guilt—it could be either.

THE LATE SPORTS

by STEPHEN DENTINGER

June Hamilton looked like one of those lush vixens on the covers of pocketbooks, just the kind who would shoot a tire-some mate. And if the accident that killed Archwright Hamilton could somehow be made to look like murder, Sunrise Arms was no longer a ruined business.

ARCHWRIGHT HAMILTON was a sportsman. He'd hunted lions in Africa, and tigers in India. He'd caught swordfish off Key West and shot wild ducks in the Canadian wilds. He'd been married twice, losing his first wife in a hunting accident, and his second in Reno. He was worth, perhaps, a half-million dollars—which was not really too much these

days. He was husky and handsome, and somewhere over forty; and when he worked, he was a lawyer.

Those were the facts. Everyone who had heard of Archwright Hamilton at all knew these facts; and perhaps some of them agreed with his second wife, who'd once called him the most useless man alive. Certainly most people would have agreed that the passing of Archwright Hamilton would go unnoticed, except maybe for a brief obituary in the pages of *Sports Illustrated*...

But the odd fact of the matter was that Archwright Hamilton's death, when it finally did occur, was far from being unnoticed. And it was to affect a number of persons who had never even heard his name while he lived...

Ken Raymond was one of those who had never heard of Archwright Hamilton. Until that Tuesday evening in January, he was simply publicity director for Sunrise Arms, Inc., a job that entailed the spreading of the name and fame of the Sunrise, "the safest, most accurate hunting rifle in the world."

But right now, at exactly 10:28 on a Tuesday evening, with the January snow piling up outside the door, he had other things on his mind...

"I need another drink."

"Hmm?"

"Ken, I need another drink!"

"You've had enough already, Lorry; I'd better take you home."

"Boy! What a wolf! You get me up here to your apartment and get me drunk, and now you want to take me home!"

"Lorry, I..."

"What's that?"

"It's the telephone; shut up a minute while I answer it."

"Don't be too long."

Ken walked across the wide, thick carpeting and picked up the pink telephone. It was pink because he was subletting the apartment from a woman who went to Florida every winter.

"Raymond here," he answered sharply, a habit he'd picked up in the army.

"This is Sonorise; all hell was broken loose. Get down to the office right away."

"What? What's up?"

"One of our rifles just killed a man; accidentally."

"I'll be right down," Ken said, and hung up. He called to Lorry as he reached into the closet for his coat. "I have to go out on business. I'll drop you at home if you like, or you can curl up on the couch here and wait for me."

"I'll wait," she said. "Don't be too long."

He grunted as he went out the door. The thought of Lorry Fairbanks curled up on the couch awaiting his return was not, somehow, one that appealed to him—though he would have been the first to admit that the thought certainly would have appealed to half the men in town.

THE WIND outside was cold, and there was a hint of snow in the air, as Raymond drove across town to the high tower that housed the headquarters of Sunrise Arms. And then there was the ride up in the elevator, dark and purring like some thing alive, responding to his touch as his finger pushed the button for the twenty-seventh floor.

And Sonorise himself, waiting...

Martin Sonorise, kind of a dying dynasty, whose father had built an empire by selling rifles to the Indians. Martin Sonorise, whose family name had somehow been corrupted years before to form "Sunrise", at one time the greatest name in hunting rifles. Martin Sonorise, big, hulking, with balding head and bushy eyebrows; a man who never gave up.

And behind his desk, as if framing his head in a halo of steel, were the new Sunrise Rifles, the safest, most accurate in the world...

"Glad you could come right over, Raymond." Everyone was a last name to Martin Sonorise. "This will be a terrible thing for business."

"Just what happened?"

"Some crazy fool shot himself with one of our new rifles."

"So?"

"The police are saying it was an accident. An *accident*, Raymond! An accident with one of our new rifles—this could ruin us!"

And Ken knew that it really could ruin them; it could be the blow that would send the tower of Sunrise Arms tumbling around them. For the major selling point of the new Sunrise hunting rifle was the simple fact that it was absolutely impossible to discharge it accidentally.

The secret of its ingenious safety device was contained in the wooden stock of the rifle, where a series of springs and bolts controlled the firing pin and the trigger. Unless the end of the stock was resting against the shoulder, and unless the gun was gripped with both hands in exactly the right places, the trigger could not be pulled.

Of course, this prevented shooting from the hip; and it might even cause an inexperienced hunter to miss his chance at a shot; but for a real hunter there was no gun like it. It could be dropped, thrown, or even given to a child to play with, and all without fear that it could be fired accidentally.

This was the gun on which rested the last hope of Sunrise Arms. Sonorise had perfected it by nearly ten years of hard work and clever business deals, including more than one patent infringement.

Ken took out a cigaret and lit it. "Tell me about it," he said. "What happened?"

Sonorise produced an early edition of one of the morning newspapers. "Here! Read about it yourself."

Under a headline reading *NOTED SPORTSMAN ACCIDENTALLY SHOT*, Ken read the story: *Arch-*

wright Hamilton, 44, prominent lawyer and sportsman, died last night as the result of a bullet wound suffered in an accident at his Long Island home. Police believe Hamilton was preparing to clean his hunting rifle when he accidentally jostled it from the table, causing it to discharge. There followed a brief account of Hamilton's life, but it was the concluding paragraph that caught Ken's eye. Police were puzzled for a time by the fact that the rifle is of a new type, supposedly impossible to discharge accidentally. But the fact that Hamilton was alone in the locked house at the time eliminated the possibility of homicide.

Raymond tossed down the paper and looked up at Sonorise. "Well?"

"What can you do about it?"

"I don't know. It's not as bad as I thought; they don't mention the Sunrise by name."

"No, of course not, but the word will get around; everyone will know what they mean. We'll be ruined!"

And perhaps he was right, Ken thought; Sunrise Arms was in bad shape these days. "I'll take a run out on the Island and talk to the police," he said. "I'll examine the gun and tell them the whole thing's impossible. Who knows? Maybe I can talk them into something."

"Good, Raymond, good," Sonorise said, in a voice full of hope. "I know you'll be able to do something."

"I don't know; I can't promise any miracles."

Sonorise leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. "We'll get through it, Raymond. You'll get us through."

Ken Raymond left the office and took the elevator back down to the street. It seemed a little colder outside...

LONG ISLAND in the January dawn was as cold and bleak as the dark side of the moon. Out across the waters of the Atlantic, the low winter clouds were slowly lightening as the

first rays of the morning sun hit them from behind. The belt parkway that twisted along the southern shore of the island brought Raymond's Buick quite close to the water at times, and he could see the breakers rolling in from the sea to die against the damp sand of the deserted beach.

In spots a little snow still covered the sand, a reminder of a New Year's Day storm that had caught the city by surprise. And the wind that swept across the island seemed never to diminish in fury. Already he could see that the sun would not break through the clouds this day, and he began to wish he was back at his apartment.

He'd stopped only long enough to drive a very tired and disappointed Lorry Fairbanks home; then he'd started out to Hamilton's Long Island home. He was used to going without sleep, a habit he'd acquired in the Army and kept during his years with Sunrise Arms. And now as the dawn broke through the last outposts of the night, he knew that all thoughts of sleep would leave him. He never could sleep in the daytime, anyway.

He swung north presently, away from the sea and up into the narrow interior of the island. Finally he reached his destination, in a small residential section not far from Belrose. The house of Archwright Hamilton was set apart from others, on the very top of what probably passed for a hill in the neighborhood. He knew it was the right one because a police car still sat in front of it, as if protecting it from some further violence.

Ken parked the Buick behind the police car and walked quickly up the wide stone steps to the door. It was opened after a moment by a hulking giant of a man who wore the uniform of the State Police.

"Yeah?"

"I'd like to speak to someone in charge of things here."

"Who are you?"

"Ken Raymond is the name. I repre-

sent the Sunrise Arms Company; I believe it was our hunting rifle that inflicted the fatal wound."

The big trooper grunted and left him standing in the hallway while he moved off into the interior of the huge house. Presently he returned with a shorter, more mature man in civilian clothes. "You're the gentleman from Sunrise Arms?"

"That's right; Ken Raymond's the name."

"I'm Cliff Yerby, Criminal Investigation Division of the State Police."

"Then there's a possibility of homicide?"

Yerby smiled. "No, we're pretty certain it was suicide. If you must know, the only thing that's causing us any doubt at all is this gun you people make; we can't quite figure out how he could have done it."

Ken sighed silently. At least suicide was better than accident; the publicity wouldn't be quite as bad with suicide. "Could I see where it happened?"

"I suppose so," the detective answered. He led the way into a room that seemed filled to overflowing with hunting trophies. To Ken it was like something from the turn of the century, when every millionaire had at least one African safari to his credit.

"I hadn't realized there were any mighty hunters left these days," he remarked. "I thought everyone was too busy shooting at humans to waste any time on animals."

"If they were, your company wouldn't sell many hunting rifles."

"We don't," Ken said with a smile, trying to make it seem like a joke.

"Well, you sold one to Archwright Hamilton, and he used it to blow a hole in his chest, right here in this room."

THE BODY was gone now, but Ken could still see the stain on the white bearskin rug; it would be there for a long time.

"It said in the paper the house was locked."

"It was. Every window and all three doors. Bolts and chain locks on everything. He apparently was in the habit of sleeping till noon and then working around the house in the early afternoon. Chances are the locks were still on from the night before. The newspaper was still on the front porch, anyway."

"He lived here all alone?"

Yerby nodded. "Ever since his second wife left him, a few months back. He had a woman who came in to clean three days a week, but this wasn't her day yesterday. I guess he ate most of his meals out, or else cooked them himself; apparently he shot himself shortly after noon and lay there bleeding to death for several hours."

That didn't sound like suicide to Ken—not a haphazard shot in the chest, when a clean one through the head would have finished the job quickly. But he knew better than to raise the objection.

"This ex-wife of his found the body. She arrived around supper time and got worried when he didn't answer her ring. His car was there, so she knew he must be in the house. She went around looking in the windows and finally saw him in here on the floor. That's when she ran to the next house and called us."

"Any chance that she could have killed him somehow?"

"Sure; a good chance if you can show us how she got in and out of the house while it was locked."

"Simple," Ken replied. "He let her in sometime after noon. She shot him and then left the house. He probably didn't realize how serious the wound was, and he locked the door after her before he collapsed and died."

"No good," Yerby said, shaking his head; "he bled like a stuck pig from the very beginning. Even if he'd had the strength to make it to the door, he'd have left a trail of blood. No, Mr.

Raymond, I'm afraid it all comes back to your hunting rifle, every time. If it wasn't suicide, it was an accident; either way, your rifle is the big problem."

The detective had walked over to a desk and picked up the weapon in question. Ken joined him and they went over the rifle together. Beyond the desk, in tall glass cases, were a dozen more rifles and one or two shotguns. Ken also noted a few revolvers in the collection, and wondered why a man considering suicide would even bother to think about a rifle when there were smaller weapons available. The answer was that he wouldn't. Whatever had happened to Archwright Hamilton, it hadn't been suicide.

"Do you mind if I take this rifle back to the factory for some tests?" he asked. "We could determine then just what happened."

"Well, since there's no suspicion of anything criminal, I suppose I could release it to you. Let me take down the serial number, and sign a receipt for it; then it's yours."

"Thanks. I'll let you have a report of our findings within a day or so."

A few minutes later, he was leaving the house, with the rifle under his arm. As he drove back to New York he thought about how happy Martin Sonorise would be...

AS IT TURNED out, Martin Sonorise was far from happy. The early editions of the afternoon papers were already on the streets, and now the headlines had changed to things like: ACCIDENT OR SUICIDE? DEFECTIVE RIFLE MAY HAVE CAUSED SPORTSMAN'S DEATH.

Even when Ken Raymond told his story and produced the rifle itself, Sonorise remained unmollified. "You damn fool," he shouted. "What if our tests show there was something faulty with the rifle? Then what do we do?"

"Let's test it first, and worry about that later."

And so they waited, through the long afternoon hours, watching the winter sun slide slowly through the heavy sky, until finally it sank, defeated, beyond the steel mountains and concrete canyons of Manhattan.

At six o'clock the inter-office phone on Sonorise's desk gave a single mournful peal, and they knew the waiting was over.

"Sonorise here."

Then there was silence as the president of Sunrise Arms waited and listened. "I see," he said at last. "Very well. Speak to no one about this, you understand? No one!"

After he'd hung up, Ken asked, "Well, what's the verdict?"

But the question was not necessary; he could read the verdict on the big man's face. And in that moment he could almost feel a tremor run through the building.

"It *could* have happened," Sonorise announced, with quiet dramatics, as if addressing a meeting of stockholders. "They say that it could have happened. The grip safety wasn't working. If the rifle was dropped on its butt with enough force, it might have gone off..."

"I guess it's time for us to start worrying."

"Not yet it isn't," Sonorise raised his voice to a shout. "This...this woman who found the body; this ex-wife. What about her?"

"What do you mean? What about her?"

"She could have killed him, couldn't she?"

"Not in a locked house."

Sonorise pounded the desk with his fist. "Then, damn it, find a way to unlock the house; find a way to get her inside. This has got to be a murder, not an accident!"

They sat in silence for a time, in the gradually darkening office. Ken lit a cigaret and smoked it down to its cork tip before grinding it out in the big metal ash tray.

"Well," Sonorise asked finally, "can you do it, or do I get someone else to handle our publicity?"

Ken lit another cigaret and thought about it some more. Presently he answered, very quietly, "I can do it."

"Good!" Sonorise said, and got up to turn on the lights...

ARCHWRIGHT HAMILTON'S second wife still kept her married name of June Hamilton, though the judge in Reno had made the divorce official several weeks before her husband's death. She was not difficult to find, and when Ken first saw her he guessed that a woman like her would always be easy for men to find.

She wore a tight-fitting red gown that plunged at the top and gathered at the bottom, and she looked very much like the girl on the covers of the paperbound novels. At first he was surprised that she was so young; but a closer examination of the half-hidden lines on her face and neck told him that she was closer to Hamilton's age than she'd first appeared.

"I really can't help you at all," she told Ken from the confines of an overstuffed chair in her Sutton Place apartment. "I explained just how it happened to the police, and there's nothing more to tell."

"Don't you think it odd that he should commit suicide?"

"It wasn't suicide; he never would have killed himself! He lived for the hunt, for the chase. A man who'll step out in front of a charging hippo isn't the kind that suddenly gets depressed for no reason at all and shoots himself."

"It's happened before."

"But not to a man like Archwright Hamilton; I know him. Remember, I was married to him."

Ken grunted and thought about how to phrase his next question. "Was it dark when you arrived at the house?"

"Yes. Why?"

"If it was dark, and there were no

lights in the house, then how do you explain the fact that you were able to look into the darkened room and see the body on the floor?"

June Hamilton shot out of the chair and began pacing the floor in anger. "I let you in because you said you just wanted to clear up a few things for your company. Now you start quizzing me like a detective! I think it's time for you to leave, Mr. Raymond."

"Before I do, I wish you'd answer my question."

She stared at him intently for some time, and the lines of age were deep in her face now. "I don't have to answer any of your questions. Now get out!"

"Very well," Ken sighed. He knew it was useless now. "Perhaps I'll be able to come and see you again some time."

"I doubt that, Mr. Raymond. Good night."

The door closed behind him as he left; in another minute he was in the street, walking quickly toward the corner where he'd left his car.

IT WAS LATE in the evening, but there was still time for a quick trip out to the house on Long Island. The police would be gone now, and he could examine it at his leisure. He drove across the East River and down the wide parkways of Queens, glistening with their neoned used car lots, and sprawling shopping centers. Briefly he dipped into Brooklyn, and then he hit the belt parkway that carried him through the night toward the house of Archwright Hamilton. This time he did not go along the shore, but stayed further inland on the more direct route.

The house, when he reached it, was dark and deserted. He parked a hundred yards down the road and went the rest of the way on foot. First he walked around to the side of the house, following the route that June Hamilton must have taken on the previous evening. He found the window without trouble and peered into the fatal room.

Yes, the blood-stained rug was vis-

ible there beneath the window, even though the rest of the room was in darkness. The brightness of the sky would have been enough for June Hamilton to see the body of her ex-husband.

And then he noticed it—a tiny hole in the window frame, near the sill. Perhaps, some time in the past, it had served as an entrance for a TV antenna wire; but now it was simply plugged with a bit of putty that came loose in Ken's hand.

He took out a tiny flashlight that he always carried and shined it through the opening. A small circle of light hit the side of the desk inside. Ken studied it for a moment before deciding that the angle was just about right. If only the hole was large enough...

After a time, Ken walked slowly back to the car. He had found what he wanted; it was not necessary to force his way into the house. Now he had only to get back to the tower office of Martin Sonorise, and to tell him of the plan. Sonorise would be happy when he heard it. He would be very happy...

Two days later, detectives, armed with a search warrant, swooped down on June Hamilton's Sutton Place apartment. When she threw a vase of flowers at one of the men, she was arrested and taken to Police Headquarters.

The next day, she was taken to a Long Island court house and formally charged with first-degree murder in the shooting of Archwright Hamilton...

Lorry Fairbanks was stretched out on the floor, reading the Sunday comic section, when Ken came out of the bedroom. "What the devil are you doing in my apartment at nine o'clock on a Sunday morning?" he demanded.

"Remember, darling? You gave me a key once, in a weak moment."

"That sure was a weak moment."

[Turn To Page 84]

What do you want at this time of the day?"

"I came to take you to church."

"Cut the kidding, and get up off the floor. You'll catch cold."

"As if you cared what happened to me. I haven't seen you for nearly a week now. Not since this sport got shot out on the Island with one of your rifles."

"So?"

"So I missed you. It's a cold winter."

He ignored her and rummaged through the pile of newspapers, until he came upon the *Tribune's* front page. The story was there, in the left-hand column. "Did you see this?"

"Yeah, I saw it; they even spelled your name right."

His eyes dropped to the paragraphs he sought, and he read them over carefully to himself. *Smart detective work on the part of Kenneth Raymond, publicity director of Sunrise Arms, was credited with cracking the baffling case. Since the shooting occurred in a locked house, it was at first believed to have been caused by an accident with a defective rifle. However, further investigation by Raymond and the state police established the fact that the fatal shot was not fired by the rifle found in the room. A search of Mrs. Hamilton's room revealed an identical rifle hidden in her closet. Though she denied all knowledge of the weapon, ballistics tests proved it to be the gun that killed her ex-husband. The bullet was apparently fired from outside the locked house, through a small hole in the window frame.*

HE TOSSED the paper back on the pile and lit a cigaret. He didn't usually smoke this early in the morning, but it was sort of a special occasion.

"You looked awfully pleased with yourself," Lorry remarked as she lifted herself from the floor and brushed off her skirt.

"I am; this little piece of work will mean a big bonus for me."

"Good! Then maybe we can get married."

"Is that all you think about?" he laughed.

"What else is there for a girl my age to think about?"

"Well, right now you could think about this thing; it means a lot to me."

She went into the tiny kitchen and began making some coffee. "Did she really do it like it says?"

"What do you mean? Why do you ask that?"

"Well...it just seems awfully lucky for your company, that's all."

"It is awfully lucky, as you say. A think like this could have ruined Sunrise Arms in its present condition."

"There are so many loose ends in the whole thing, though; it's not at all like in the detective stories I read."

"What loose ends?" he asked, trying to keep his voice even.

"Well, for instance why did she shoot him around noon, and then return that night to pretend she'd just found the body?"

"To divert suspicion from herself, of course. I guess you haven't read very many detective stories."

"Well, then, how could she have stood out there at the side of his house at high noon with a rifle and fire the fatal shot without even being seen by anyone?"

"It's on top of a small hill, quite a ways from the other houses. She wouldn't be seen unless a car happened by at the right moment."

"Well, then there's the business of the rifle. What was she doing with it, anyway?"

"Hamilton probably bought her one to match his. She admits they sometimes went hunting together while they were still married."

"Well, I don't know..."

"There's no doubt about it. The rifle we found in her apartment was the

[Turn To Page 86]

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one that killed Hamilton." He was growing irritated with her now; she was asking too many questions.

Lorry came back into the living room with two cups of steaming coffee. "You drink it black in the morning, too?"

"Yeah. You should know all my habits by this time."

The doorbell rang at that moment and they exchanged puzzled looks. Ken motioned toward the bedroom. "You'd better go in there; I'll see who it is."

He pulled his robe a little tighter around him and walked to the door. The face on the other side of it was familiar, but it took Ken a full ten seconds to remember that it was the face of Cliff Yerby of the State Police...

"PLEASE understand, Mr. Raymond," Yerby was saying, "I'm not here to question you, or anything like that. This is strictly out of my territory, and I'm just making a personal

call on my own time."

"O.K. Get to the point. I've still got to get to church this morning."

"Well..." the short man hesitated. "I really don't know just how to begin. It's about the arrest of Miss...or Mrs...Hamilton."

"What about it?"

"Well...it's just that I personally am not 100% satisfied."

"What do you mean, you're not satisfied? You've got everything but a confession, haven't you?"

"Everything but a confession and a motive."

"Motive! Since when does a woman need a special motive to shoot her ex-husband?"

"She needs a mighty good motive when it means the end of the monthly checks. And then there's something odd about the shot coming through that little hole in the window frame, too."

"Why? The hole's big enough for a bullet to pass through."

[Turn To Page 88]



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"Yes," the short man agreed, "but it could only have been done by pressing the barrel right against the hole; and in that case why weren't there any powder burns around the hole?"

What was happening this morning, anyway? First Lorry and now this detective. He struggled to get control of himself. "Well, if you've seen the ballistics report you know that's the only way it could have happened."

"Oh, I've seen the report all right. I examined the rifle again myself—the one that you borrowed from me the other day. I even checked the serial number and, luckily, I'd made a small nick in the stock before I let you take it. There's no doubt in my mind that it's the same weapon. And yet... I just can't believe that it didn't fire the fa-

tal shot. I can't believe that Mrs. Hamilton did it with another rifle."

"Just what are you implying, anyway?"

"I'm not implying a thing, Mr. Raymond; but the way it turned out was very fortunate for your company. I imagine, before too long, you'll turn up a record proving that Hamilton bought two of those rifles at the same time, too."

"We're working on it, I must admit."

"It's always good to have the police job done for you by private citizens, Mr. Raymond. You can rest assured that we appreciate everything you and Mr. Sonoris have done to further the cause of justice."

"Thank you," Ken said quietly, try-
[Turn To Page 90]

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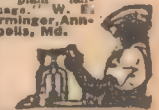
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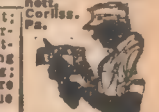
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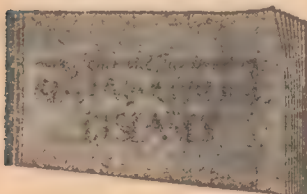
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ing to decide just how Yerby had meant his remarks. Then he realized that the detective was staring at the two cups of coffee on the table as if he had just realized their significance.

"I... You caught me at a bad time. I was entertaining a friend."

"Yes, I see. Well, Mr. Raymond, I don't want to take up any more of your time. But I just had to get a little of this off my chest, that's all. I had to let you know that I'm still working on the case..."

Ken's hand shook a little at these words, and he spilled a little of the coffee that was halfway to his lips. Yerby seemed not to notice, and he said no more as Ken showed him to the door.

WHEN HE was gone, Ken Raymond leaned heavily against the door and sighed with relief. Then he called to Lorry to come out of hiding.

She came, strolling slowly into the room, and picking up her coffee cup.

She was silent for some time, and when she spoke she said very quietly, "How did you do it, Ken? How did you frame her for that murder? Because I know you did, and I'm not going to let you get away with it just to save that lousy company of yours..."

"Lorry, I..."

"I don't want any excuses or stories; I just want the truth, Ken. How did you work that trick with those rifles? This man Yerby knows you did it, too, you know. But he doesn't know how either."

"Lorry, listen to me a minute, will you? What are you so worried about these people for, all of a sudden? Archwright Hamilton was nothing but a playboy, and his ex-wife probably isn't much better. He could have died on a hunting trip in the Congo or at a drunken party on Long Island and it wouldn't have meant a thing to you. But just because circumstances have thrown me into this mess, they're sud-

[Turn To Page 92]

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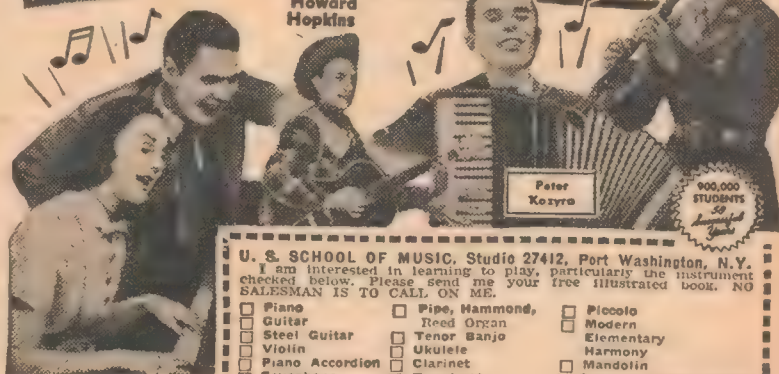
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CRACK DETECTIVE STORIES

denly important people—worth fighting for, and worth saving. Hamilton is just one of the late sports now, not as big a man as a thousand other guys who die forgotten every year. Why should we worry about him or his ex-wife?"

She sat down and faced him with serious set eyes. "It's hard to believe that you're the man I wanted to marry such a short time ago, Ken. You've lost yourself somewhere in the winding towers of Sunrise Arms, Inc. And one of these days those towers are going to come crashing down, and they're going to bury you and Martin Sonorise in the ruins." She was on her feet again then, grabbing up her coat and heading for the door.

He sat very still for a long time, looking at the door that had closed behind her and thinking about what she had said. Then, after a while, he walked over to the telephone and dialed Martin Sonorise's number...

THE WINTER sun was low behind the Manhattan clouds that Sunday afternoon. The temperature was hovering around freezing, and a brisk wind was blowing in from the East River, from a storm somewhere out in the Atlantic.

Ken Raymond came out of the old limestone church and headed north toward the tower of Sunrise Arms. Perhaps Martin Sonorise would be there by now, and they could have the talk that had suddenly become so important.

He passed a newsstand at 42nd Street, and the headline on the Sunday afternoon edition of the *Enquirer* caught his eye: **JUNE QUIZZED ON FIRST WIFE'S DEATH.** He bought a paper and stood there on the street corner reading the story. Archwright Hamilton's first wife had been killed several years before, in a hunting accident out west. June Hamilton had been his secretary at the time, and it

THE LATE SPORTS

had been she who fired the fatal shot. A coroner's jury had ruled the killing an accident, and a year later Hamilton had married his secretary. But now, in view of these latest developments, the police were again looking into that fatal shooting.

Ken folded the paper and stuffed it into his overcoat pocket. It was a development he'd not foreseen, and he tried to fit it into the decision he'd already made.

As he reached the Sunrise Arms building, he could see a light burning in the tower offices of Martin Sonorise. He took the night elevator to the twenty-seventh floor and walked down the hall to the president's office.

"Good evening, Raymond."

The glare from the hidden sun was still visible on the horizon, but Ken realized that evening was not too far off. "Good evening, Mr. Sonorise."

"Now what was it that was important it couldn't keep till Monday morning?"

"I've decided we can't go through with it; we can't frame that woman for the killing."

"You've decided! You don't decide anything around here, just remember that. I do the deciding, Raymond."

Any minute now, he'll start pounding the desk, Ken thought. "But she's innocent!"

"Of this death, yes! But she killed Hamilton's first wife on a hunting trip; it's all in the papers."

"Maybe she did, but that doesn't change things as far as we're concerned. I'm calling that detective, Yerby, and I'm going to tell him everything. I just wanted to tell you before I did it."

Sonorise hit the desk with a mighty fist, jarring the fountain pen loose from its holder. He turned and pointed at the rifles that hung on the wall behind his head.

"Look at them. Look at them, Raymond. Look at this building. It was all

[Turn Page]

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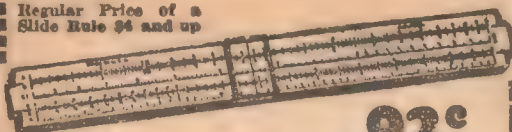
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CRACK DETECTIVE STORIES

built up on the foundation of my father's work! Nearly seventy-five years of fighting and building and sweating. And you want to wipe it all out with a phone call. . . ."

"I'm sorry," Ken said as he reached across the desk for the telephone. The man behind the desk seemed suddenly to go limp and to sink back into his padded chair.

IT TOOK Raymond only a minute to reach the State Police barracks on Long Island; within five minutes he'd been switched to Cliff Yerby's office. As the waiting minutes ticked by, he let his eyes steal to the huge oil painting of the first Sonorise, hanging in its heavy golden frame on the far wall of the office. The man in the painting was wearing an Indian necklace of some kind, as if he was proud of his dealings with them. He was sitting in a great chair with a leopard-skin thrown over the back, and across his lap he held an early model Sunrise rifle. He did not look very much like the man behind the desk who was his son. . . .

"Yerby? This is Ken Raymond from Sunrise Arms. I've been thinking about our little talk this morning, and I called to tell you a few things."

"Hold on a second," the detective answered. And then: "Is it all right with you if I make a recording of this?"

"Go ahead; I'll stand behind what I say."

"All right." And on the line, Ken could hear the distinctive 'beep' at fifteen-second intervals that told him his words were being transmitted to a thin piece of wire or tape.

"Well, Yerby, I'll have to make this brief, but here are the main points. You were right in everything you said this morning. June Hamilton had nothing to do with the death of her husband. He was killed by a defective Sunrise hunting rifle that discharged

[Turn To Page 26]

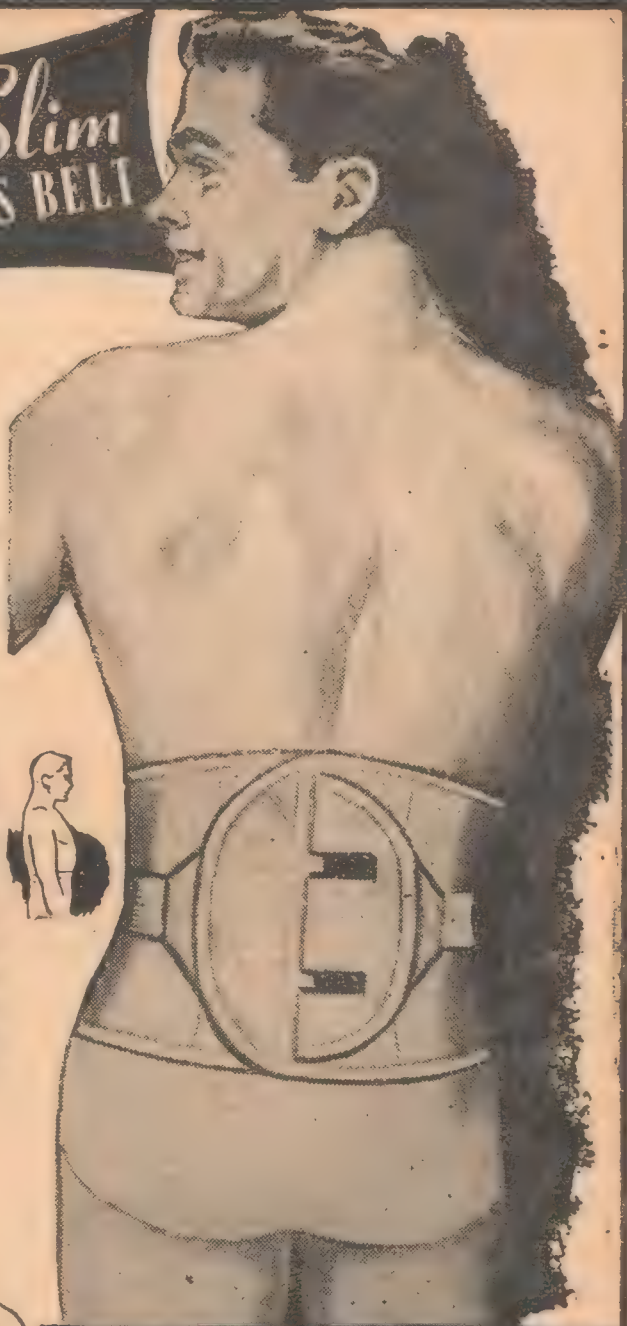
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when he accidentally dropped it. . . .
Across the wide desk Martin Sonorise heard the words and raised himself from the chair. " . . . Our tests of the weapon proved this to be true, but to protect the interests of the firm we decided to frame Mrs. Hamilton for the killing."

The phone gave another beep and Yerby asked, "How did you manage to do that when I had the serial number of the gun?" He spoke carefully, as if to be certain his words would be clear on the recording.

"We substituted the barrels of the rifles. We took the barrel out of Hamilton's weapon and put it into another identical gun; then we managed to hide that rifle in June Hamilton's room before we tipped off the police. In the meantime, the death weapon was returned to you with a new barrel that couldn't possibly have fired the fatal bullet. It was a different gun, but it still carried the same serial number and it still bore the little mark you made in the stock."

"That was clever," Yerby said, "but I'm glad you decided to tell the truth. However, that won't make a great deal of difference to Mrs. Hamilton. She's just confessed to the murder of her husband's first wife. . . ."

Across the room Martin Sonorise had taken down one of the gleaming rifles from the rack on the wall. With a motion that was almost too fast for Ken's eye to follow, he shoved a single cartridge into the breech and slammed it shut.

"Yerby," Ken said, trying to keep his voice calm. "Yerby, you'd better get somebody up here right away; I'm in Sonorise's office. . . ."

MARTIN SONORISE'S foot shot out and twisted around the telephone cord, yanking the phone from the desk. Ken let the receiver drop from his hand as he half turned to face the big man with the rifle.

[Turn To Page 98]



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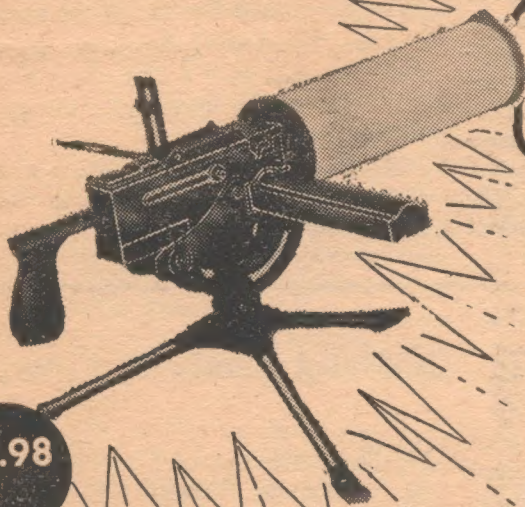
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"I didn't think you'd do it to me," Martin Sonorise said. "My father and I spent a lifetime building this company. I didn't think you'd ruin it with one phone call." The rifle in his hand was steady and its barrel was pointed at Ken's chest.

"You're mad, Sonorise. Put down that gun; the girl has confessed to the other murder. They'll be willing to forget about our tampering with the evidence."

"Perhaps. But the newspapers won't forget about the defective rifle. It'll be the end for me, so I'm going to make it the end for you, too." He raised the rifle an inch and pressed the stock against his body to clear the safety catches. "I'm going to kill you, Raymond. Right now."

Ken started forward, but he knew he could never cover the distance between them before the big gun fired its lone messenger of death.

And he was right.

Before he had taken a single step Martin Sonorise pulled the trigger...

They stood there like that for the eternal space of a single second, waiting for the blinding road that did not come.

And then, gradually, they both realized that it would never come, and Martin Sonorise looked down at the perfect rifle in his hands, the product

of years of research. "It didn't fire," he said very quietly; and suddenly Ken felt somehow sorry for this man who had tried to kill him.

"No," he said, and his mouth was very dry.

The rifle dropped with a thud to the carpeted floor, and the big man seemed to collapse with it. "It didn't fire," he kept repeating. "I pulled the trigger and nothing happened."

And then Ken could stand no more of it. He walked to the door and out into the hallway, and as he walked the elevator was already releasing two policemen who had been sent by Yerby.

From the office behind him came the sound of a single shattering crash as the huge window behind Martin Sonorise's desk gave way, and Ken knew that the king of Sunrise Arms would beat his toppling tower to the ground...

He called Lorry Fairbanks from a pay phone across the street, and the night mists were settling over Manhattan as he waited for her on the corner.

The crowds were breaking up now and there was only a lone street cleaner scrubbing the blood from the pavement.

Ken looked beyond the mists to the clear night sky and decided it would be a good day tomorrow...

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